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THE Public Interest

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ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLIC SPACES

A Special Issue

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Architecture and Public Spaces

TWENTY years ago, a quiet revolution took place in American thinking about the city. Up until then, planners and public officials had generally believed that urban problems could best be mitigated through improvements and additions to the physical equipment of the city: streets, sewers, parks, bridges, subways, civic centers, zoning, housing projects, planned suburbs. But by the early 1960s, with race riots in the larger cities, rapid neighborhood decay, and increasing crime, to think of a city primarily in physical terms seemed naive and inadequate. Social programs to combat poverty and inequality were necessary, and they came in abundance in the 1960s and 1970s. Building projects continued, but the emphasis of planners and politicians had shifted. The great increase in federal aid to cities came in the form of poverty programs, model cities programs, manpower training, community action, and so on. Although some of these social programs still used bricks and mortar, their first targets were poverty and inequality. The education of city planners followed this shift, from studies of physical form to the new social issues, government programs, budgeting and management, and community action. Most architects remained within their traditional craft, but some found mere building an inadequate response to the urban crisis, and turned to social activism instead.

The Public Interest followed these developments closely. And it was not alone in signaling regret, again and again, that the new social programs did not seem to improve urban life significantly, and may have harmed it in some ways. This view is shared by many students of the city today. While we still need social programs in some form and at some level, it is difficult to assert any longer that social policy alone can make cities "work." So local

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governments, planners, and architects are now turning their attention back to the traditional urban issues still under their control: planning, land use, preservation, physical infrastructure, public buildings, parks, and, more generally, public spaces. Spending obligations—especially on social programs, it should be noted—limit what governments can do, but there is a growing sense that public planning and public building can make significant indirect contributions to our civic, social, and economic goals in the city.

THIS return to questions of the urban environment has been made all the more fruitful by recent trends in architecture. Whether one calls them "post-modern" or simply recent modern, architects are once again interested in how their buildings fit into cities and to what civic purposes their buildings are put. In their reaction against the formalism of early modern architecture, they now find themselves debating issues of the greatest public interest: how to build with "complexity and contradiction"; the proper uses of historical forms; the importance of monuments and monumentality in cities; community taste and vernacular style; the use and shaping of public places. Architects today are devoting new energy to building city halls and museums, planning indoor and outdoor public markets, and designing parks and smaller public places.

In this spirit, *The Public Interest* has asked a number of architects, planners, critics, and social thinkers to contribute essays to a special issue on "Architecture and Public Spaces."

Over the past 18 years we have published many articles on urban politics, urban economics, and urban social policy. These issues are hardly less pressing, but certainly less tractable. A pause seems justified. So we turn to architecture and planning, and especially their public (or civic) dimensions. These essays represent no single point of view on architecture or public spaces. They are mainly historical examinations of how streets, monuments, parks, government buildings, and freeways have been shaped, and in turn how they have shaped us. The authors share no programs, though they do share the sense that politics, planning, and architecture cannot be divorced, that to speak of the city is also to speak of its physical form, as well as of its politics, economic well-being, social life, and culture. We hope to continue bringing architects and social thinkers together to consider the city in this light. It is only in addressing politics and architecture together that we do justice to either.

—The Editors

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Public space and the classical vernacular

ROGER SCRUTON

A CONSIDERATION of "public space" should begin by defining terms. Contained within this pair of words are two ideas of the utmost importance—that of public-ness and that of space—and it is arguable that a failure to understand them has been responsible for many of the recent disasters in town planning, both in Europe and in America.

The public is to be contrasted with the private. In the private sphere a man is his own master, within the limits prescribed for him by morality and law. At the same time, and paradoxically, he is closely constrained by domestic circumstances. His projects, rhythm, time, and companionship reflect the immediate demands of intimacy and the obligations of family life. In public he may breathe more freely, but in private the needs of his spouse, parents, and children tie him by an overriding law.

The public is a sphere of broad and largely unplanned encounter. No individual is sovereign in this sphere, but each, on entering it, renounces the right to dictate the terms upon which he communes and conflicts with others. His projects are subject, not to the discipline of domestic affection, but to the vacillating opposition of adversaries and fools. His time and rhythm are to a great extent his

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own, but they are also forced into a flexibility which they need not otherwise acquire. If a person is to advance in the public sphere it is either in opposition to others, or in agreement with them. The purpose of civil government is to ensure that agreement is the norm.

In *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel drew a contrast between family and civil society, arguing that each is necessary to the development of the individual, and that neither is complete until fully embodied in the impartial legislation of a state. In the family the ruling principle is piety: respect, love, and obedience towards the spirit of the hearth. My family exists only partly by my choice, and forms the immovable condition of my existence. The love that I owe to it stems, not from contract, but from the obligations of human gratitude. By contrast, civil society is the sphere of choice, and its ruling principle is contract or agreement—the faculty whereby we move peaceably among our fellows, making concessions, earning advantages, and agreeing on terms.

On the basis of that distinction, we may add further substance to the idea of the public. In entering the public sphere, the individual exchanges the security, inevitability, and obligation of family life for the uncertainty and fluidity of civil society. In this realm the individual cannot be sovereign, and he moves in a world resistant to his purposes. At the same time he enjoys a freedom that he cannot enjoy in private. The immovable obligations of the hearth are replaced by the wayward and transient obligations of contract, through which the individual secures the cooperation of strangers in the ends and means of his existence.

The public world can exist only if sustained by the assent of those who enter it, and by a prescriptive state strong enough to resolve conflicts. Civil society therefore requires both the state, which administers justice, and the virtue in the common citizen that makes government possible. People must abide by the norms of justice, and treat one another, in Kant's famous words, "not as means only, but also as ends." The most important sign that they are prepared to do this is their obedience to a code of manners. Good manners are the formalized expression of the ruling virtue of civil society—the virtue of "respect for persons," as agents able freely to bind themselves to strangers, despite, and because of, the fact that they owe no debt of gratitude or love. Another name for this virtue is "civility." Civility is the essential condition for the building of a public world.

In sketching the distinction between the private and the public I have used political concepts, for the distinction is to be under-

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stood in political terms. What I have said is of course contentious, but I hope that it serves to suggest that the idea of the public is not only complex, but also essential to a full understanding of the human condition. Architecture, which draws in tangible forms the boundary between the private and the public, is therefore a major component of political order, which leaves indelible marks upon the civil society whose space it defines. It is, as Ruskin remarked in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, the most political of the arts. In what follows I shall discuss the ways in which architecture both defines the space of human action, and also endows that space with a public character.

Created space vs. natural space

This brings me to the second term: "space." This does not refer to the physical dimension studied by the geometer, which exists everywhere and in unlimited quantities. Nor does it refer simply to the space perceived and understood by human beings through observation and movement—the "phenomenological space" of the psychologist and the philosopher. It refers rather to the perceived boundaries, created by human labor, which mark out the areas of our world. A space is made public by the nature of its boundary. It is a space into which anyone may enter, and from which anyone may depart, without the consent of strangers, and without any declaration—however tacit—of a justifying purpose. The boundary which creates a public space is both permeable and open to our public uses. A truly public architecture is one which attempts to record and symbolize the condition of civil life, by reminding us at every juncture of our freedom to engage in it. It is an architecture which possesses the virtue of civility. We must attempt, therefore, to understand the kind of boundary which such an architecture erects.

The boundaries of the private are, in a sense, easier to define. They consist in shelter and protection, and in the intimate vigilance of inner walls. The inner walls of a house are the most important sign of the domestic life that takes place in it. The color scheme, pictures, and ornaments tell us how the occupant perceives the boundaries of the family. For some, these boundaries open into another, larger world. For others, they provide a mirror, which points always inward, to the security of home.

The boundaries of the public are more fluid and variable. Their purpose is not to bear the imprint of a single life, but to remain

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open to all life that may legitimately claim their protection. For the most part, a public space is confined by facades, external walls, and railings. However, one should not forget that most important of all public spaces, the church, mosque, or temple, in which an interior is devoted to public use and made open and available to all. In the church or mosque the roof is really the sky made close to us, and the walls move out from the worshipper, signifying not confinement, but the infinite vastness of God's creation. I shall be concerned not with public buildings, but with the spaces defined by their external walls. Hence I shall not comment on the use and design of churches. It should be borne in mind, therefore, that my remarks will be incomplete, and that I will have avoided one of the most important problems which confronts the architect of public space: the problem of the public *interior*. I shall consider only those public spaces which are also "outside." Furthermore, I shall refrain from discussing either squares or open markets, although, as will be seen, both are extremely pertinent to my theme. Instead I propose to concentrate on the street, as the most basic of public exteriors.

The wild countryside may be open to unlimited human movement, but it has no point of contact with the private world, no point at which to announce its public purpose. It is "unbounded," not because it goes on forever, but because its perimeter has no mark. Lacking a boundary, it lacks the character of public-ness, for it lacks social stigma altogether. Nature is neither private nor public, but merely beyond society.

Nevertheless, nature presents us with experiences that we cannot forgo. We may stroll in it, and our movements are not in any obvious way constricted by it; nor does it declare in all its features, "Private Property, Keep Out." We also long for nature, and are prepared to go far in order to reach it. As a result, there has emerged a very important idea of public space. According to this idea, which has been extremely influential in modern planning, a public space is primarily a substitute for nature. Under the baneful tutelage of Ebeneezer Howard, Lewis Mumford, and Le Corbusier, the park has become accepted as a paradigm; it is the area in the heart of a city where the citizen can walk freely. Underlying this idea is a peculiar view of civil association: Our primary civil need, it is supposed, is to escape from the pressures of others, and in the park we become free, by becoming free of others. We then commune effortlessly with the birds and the trees, refresh our weary faculties, and rid our systems of the physical and moral poison of urban life.

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The primacy of the street

In a distinguished and familiar book, Jane Jacobs has argued that the emphasis on parks displays a concealed hostility to the city and its works.[1] The logical conclusion of this hostility—the tower block rising without neighbors out of a park without streets—was embraced by Le Corbusier, and preached to the world with an inflammatory rhetoric equal to that of Lenin and Hitler. The result lies everywhere about us—dead trodden wastes, crowned by concrete slums, places as unfriendly and dangerous as they are ugly, places, to put it succinctly, in which public life has been extinguished, and in which the partitions that secure what is private are no longer walls but barricades. I believe that the moral of Miss Jacob's treatise must be learned by every architect and planner. Cities do indeed need public spaces. It is not *space*, however, but *public-ness* that is the principal requirement. Space does not become public merely by ceasing to be private, or by being provided in quantities that no private purpose requires. Moreover, when there is no public space, private space too is threatened.

People can live without parks, but not without streets; they can live without greenery, but not without accessible windows and doors. The street is the most important of open public spaces, and the task of constructing a street is the most important that any planner may face. Anyone who has studied the ruins of Ephesus or Pergae will quickly appreciate the immense energy and skill that the Romans devoted to this task. One may naturally doubt that the civic virtues which inspired the glories of Roman architecture, and which produced such a harmony between the private and the public in all aspects of government and law, could either be renewed or widely appreciated in our equalizing age. But it is important to see that the classical vernacular styles which the Romans perfected, and which have lasted until recent times, were, by their good manners, the greatest single reason for the existence in our cities of genuine public space. Everywhere, in Europe and America, the pedestrian confronts Roman architecture, whose forms and details speak a public language that he understands. In studying this language we shall gain insight into our subject. Its first important aspect is the street, construed as an assembly of facades.

Jane Jacobs has persuasively argued that the emphasis on parks, and the neglect of streets, is a product of a planning mentality. In

[1] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).

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order to grasp the problem, the planner divides human life into isolated functions. He then proceeds to "decontaminate" these functions, to isolate them one from the other, and to assign areas to each. The house, the street, the park, the industrial precinct—each becomes (in Le Corbusier's revealing word) a "machine," for the satisfaction of some human use. Here you eat, there you shop, here you take exercise, there you rest. The result, however, is chaos. The individual retreats into that lonely apartment in the tower block which, being surrounded by no public world with which to contrast its inner isolation, cannot achieve the true security of private life. The private and the public are alike objective forms of moral order, but in this "decontaminated" world there can be no objective order. All is subjectivity, the isolated and unjustified "I want," built upon itself in a thousand repetitions.

By contrast, Miss Jacobs tellingly describes the true life of the street—the diversity of functions and the tacit cooperation which people spontaneously achieve when doors and windows bring them into constant contact. The street has eyes which guard it, tongues which instruct it, hands which help it; it is a busy sphere of human understanding, whose perimeters are also the points of entry into private worlds. Naturally, there are good streets and bad streets, peaceful streets and violent streets. And the mere existence of a street can hardly suffice to guarantee the good behavior and social cooperation of its residents. Nevertheless, it is surely reasonable to suppose that, insofar as architecture has any role to play in supporting the social life of those who live with it, the street of congenial facades must inevitably offer more basic nourishment than the block of dead corridors.

Planning for spontaneity

It is not difficult to see the parallel between Miss Jacobs's criticism of urban planning, and the modern criticisms of socialist planning—and it is worth emphasizing the common utopian inspiration that caused socialism and modern architecture to be, for a while, confused.[2] F.A. Hayek (who is, I think, the most thoroughgoing critic of the planned economy) argues in roughly the following way: The business of producing and distributing what is necessary for survival is a collective task, and can be successfully accomplished

[2] Consider in particular the "socialist" inspiration of Ebeneezer Howard's "Garden City," and the far more sinister Leninism of the Bauhaus, and in particular of its second director, Hannes Meyer. See Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), chap. 6.

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only with the help of collective knowledge.[3] This knowledge is not theoretical but practical; it consists in a myriad of responses and skills that, in motivating people to their own projects, secure also the advantage of society as a whole. The "tacit knowledge" of individuals is a social affair. It is stored, so to speak, in the spontaneous institutions of civil society, and in no institution more effectively than in that of the market. The participant in a free market is prompted spontaneously to act in a manner that secures the efficient transfer of goods. The tacit knowledge contained in this social institution could never be translated into a rational plan, for a plan must inevitably destroy the knowledge that it is meant to embody, by destroying the conditions for its exercise. The true failure of the planned economy is therefore epistemological: The plan pretends to a knowledge which it cannot embody, and which indeed cannot exist except in the concrete form of social practice.

It is not difficult to recognize in Hayek's description of the market a further embellishment of the Hegelian idea of society. Civil society is a sphere of spontaneous cooperation under contract. Contract here includes the multitude of hardly observable niceties of tacit agreement, whereby business is conducted between strangers. According to Hayek, this aspect of civil society depends upon a store of tacit knowledge which it also creates. And what is true of the market might be true of civil society generally. If that were so, then we could see Miss Jacobs's criticism of the "decontaminated" plan as reflecting a philosophy of the "public." The public order depends upon a complex pattern of practical knowledge. The attempt to embody this knowledge in a plan is doomed to failure, for the plan is epistemologically incompetent. The tacit knowledge upon which social order depends is lost, just so soon as that social order is broken down into disaggregated functions, and presented as a theoretical problem. Jacobs's critique then becomes, like Hayek's, a special case of the conservative critique of utopianism—the critique which originated in Burke's defense of "prejudice," and which culminated in theories of politics and economics which have at last gained common currency.

Many of Hayek's disciples have been tempted by his argument to conclude that it is better to have no planning whatsoever, and to consign our destiny to a regimen of "spontaneous" social interaction. This conclusion is, I believe, dangerous. The conditions of

[3] F.A. Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974). The argument is conveniently summarized by John Gray, "Hayek as a Conservative Thinker," *Salisbury Review* 4 (Summer, 1983).

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"spontaneous order" belong to an age when populations were small, immobile, uninstructed, and, above all, bound by a moral order that contained their ambitions within the limits of peaceful coexistence. These conditions no longer prevail. We must now apply our minds to the question of survival, and, although it is surely the height of folly to tamper with those natural institutions which the Hayekians defend, it is also equally foolish to consign our future entirely to their operation. A conscious effort must be made so as to defend a "spontaneous order" that can no longer defend itself. To think that our plans will inevitably destroy that order is to imagine that they must inevitably overreach their epistemological competence.

But this need not be so. Consider the skill of cycling. To know how to ride a bicycle is to possess a piece of practical knowledge which resides in the will and readiness of the body, and could not be acquired merely by studying the theory of the bicycle. At the same time, someone who studies the theory may learn to design a better bicycle—one that leads to the acquisition of better and more efficient skills. Thus practical and theoretical knowledge may coexist about a single theme, the second providing part of the foundation of the first.

Likewise there may be plans which attempt neither to displace practical knowledge, nor to make it explicit, but simply to understand and improve the conditions from which it grows. Indeed, there have been successful premeditations in which human ingenuity attempted to supplement the spontaneous order of social existence by providing more propitious circumstances for its exercise. No better example exists than the detailed plans exhibited by the streets of Ephesus and Pergae—plans motivated by the desire to provide a fitting background to civil life. What is required, I believe, is not the abolition of planning, but the abolition of the "planning mentality" which sees every problem in terms of a set of disaggregated tasks.

Our "alienated" cities

This "planning mentality" is deficient, not only for the reasons offered by Miss Jacobs, but for another, and perhaps deeper, reason. It sees the human world in terms of a clear dichotomy between ends and means. The "rational" plan is the one which involves the right choice of means to given ends. And the ends themselves are specified in functional terms. We need light, air, food, exercise. To

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each of these functions is assigned a mechanism for its fulfillment. This way of thinking causes the city itself to be divided up into ends and means. There are parks, theaters, churches, restaurants, in which our common purposes are accomplished. These, therefore, are the true public spaces, to which we proceed and in which we find our fulfillment. If the park has become so important in modern planning it is because of a libertarian idea of human ends. Ends must not be imposed on people. On the contrary, people must be free to discover them for themselves. The park, unlike the church, does not bear the imprint of any particular set of values. It is a place to which all may go and seek, in recreation, the peculiar satisfaction that they covet. The park is essentially "open to our uses," providing the background to every individual aim. In short, it is not so much a public space as an open arena, in which the modern individualist may roam freely, pursuing his private satisfactions. It is a place of "outdoor privacy"—or rather "subjectivity," since to call this privacy is once again to presuppose the constraints of an objective order.

Both the libertarian morality, and the underlying conception of rationality, serve to devalue the street. The street is seen essentially as a means, a conduit through which we proceed, either to other means (such as the place of work) or to our true ends, in park or theater or home. The most important feature of a street becomes its quality as a conduit. Does it permit easy, rapid circulation? The result of attempting to answer that question in the affirmative can be seen in acres of American cities—deserts stormed by squads of motor cars, in which the desire for easy circulation has, paradoxically, so increased the distances between every human objective as to confine people for hours on end in the forced privacy of a motor car. This solution was in fact recommended by Le Corbusier. The Real Presence of the *Ville Radieuse* is downtown Los Angeles.

It is the mark of rational beings that the ends of their conduct cannot be divorced from the means. Ends and means interpenetrate, and each rational activity can be seen, now as the one, now as the other. There are, of course, activities that are no more than means, and can be seen in no other way. These used to be called "drudgery," although deference to Marx requires us to use the expression "alienated labor." The correct "restoration of man to himself" is not the replacement of work by leisure, but the provision of better work —work which is not merely a means, but also an end. Such work, which treats the laborer as an end, has the virtue of civility. Similarly, the correct way to plan a street is not as a means of access

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to other things, but as an end in itself—a place that can be enjoyed for its own sake. The diversifying and mingling of functions that Miss Jacobs recommends may indeed form a part of this enterprise. Far more important, however, is the provision of a human boundary —walls and facades that lend themselves to human purposes, and can be perceived immediately in human terms. The classical idiom is devoted to the perfection of civil boundaries. It is an idiom of facades, junctures, and progressions. It defines space effectively, precisely because it is in itself something more than space, something more than the abstract language of geometry.

London and the classical vernacular

By "classical" I mean the pattern-book vernacular which we have inherited directly from eighteenth-century building, and indirectly from Rome. The purpose of the pattern book was to solve the problems of the wall: what size and shape of aperture, what divisions, mouldings and string courses, what architraves, porticoes, and keystones. The idea was simple: The builder adopted a repeatable vocabulary of recognizable forms, each with an established visual meaning. He was thereby able to fit houses, shops and factories neatly together, so as to soothe the eye of the pedestrian, and retain a reassuring human vigilance in the street. Now, the most important part of every building is the facade, since this is the part which everyone may see. The classical idiom generates facades in comformity with the elementary rules of politeness.[4] The resulting street invariably has the character of a public space, in which people are encouraged to linger at will, for it has the character of civility.

The classical idiom does not so much impose unity, as make diversity agreeable. The London street in which I live contains houses of every shape and size, arranged behind facades that stand politely beside one another. The porticoes are identical, as are the window frames—each being cobbled together from standard parts. No house obtrudes into the path of the pedestrian, but each meets the pavement with obvious signs of welcome. The windows, crowned by moulded architraves, have that kind of half-smiling look which permits you to glance into them; the flight of steps softens the approach to the door, and provides a useful area of neutral ground between the public and the private; the portico shelters the visitor, and also

[4] See A. Trystan Edwards, *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture* (London: Philip Allen, 1924), especially chap. 1, "Civic Values."

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alerts him to the proportions of the interior hall. The walls fall into the areas protected by heavy iron railings. These railings provide pleasant knobs which people clutch as they stand in conversation, and upon which children hang in play. At the corner of the block stands a house without an area; here the wall joins the pavement through a lightly moulded skirting, which protects the stucco and creates an agreeable fugue of parallel lines. The English are not given to sitting on doorsteps, or to standing about. Nevertheless, their movements in this street have a markedly leisurely quality, and when, as on the occasion of Prince Charles's marriage, we gathered together for a party, the orderly windows and the porticoes seemed to provide protection, and endowed our comings and goings with a naturalness that they could hardly have acquired in a park, or in any other place that was not so agreeably overlooked by accessible entrances.

Around me are many such streets, built on the edge of Kensington Park. My walks take me, not into the park—although let me not disparage it—but into these streets, which have so inexhaustible a fascination for a Londoner. It is not so much the human life and human opportunities that are attractive—although these are present in abundance. It is the architecture, which retains a human presence around all who walk before its walls. These vital and vivid boundaries create a vital and vivid space. The politeness of the style—the refusal to outrage or to defy—reminds one constantly of the ideal condition of society, in which people seek not to confront but to cooperate, and in which conversation takes the place of command. Walls, which divide space, also create it. And it is the discipline of the wall which is the pride of the classical vernacular. We linger where walls invite us, and hurry where they exclude us. Plate glass facades leave us over-exposed to observation from those behind them. Blank concrete screens seal us off from whatever they contain. A street must avoid all such extremes. It must provide us with walls that are pierced, and openings that are civil and friendly.

North Kensington was not planned—or at least it was planned only in the most rudimentary fashion. Beyond Kensington Park there are few public spaces in the modern planner's sense of the term—only long strings of streets like mine, clustered around Ladbroke Grove and Portobello Road, some with large communal gardens, some devoid of vegetation altogether. Yet this part of London is eminently public. It has lent itself to every form of human industry, both commerce and manufacture. It has also lent itself to

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human leisure. At the moment of writing, it is invaded by the annual carnival. Blacks from all the London Boroughs ride through the streets in colorful floats, and fill the air with the sound of steel bands. These streets are frequented in equal measure by the aimless and the purposeful, for they are bounded by surfaces that concede the validity of civil life. The classical wall, which is humanly proportioned, safe, gregarious, and quietly vigilant, constantly reminds the pedestrian that he is not alone, that he is in a world of human encounter, and that he must match the good manners of the wall which confines and guides him.

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A meaning for monuments

WILLIAM HUBBARD

UPON first seeing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., columnist James J. Kilpatrick reacted with these words:

> We walked... and gradually the long walls of the monument came into view. Nothing I had heard of or written had prepared me for the moment. I could not speak. I wept. There are the names. The names! ... For twenty years I have contended that these men died in a cause as noble as any cause for which a war was ever fought. Others have contended, and will always contend, that these dead were uselessly sacrificed in a no-win war that should never have been waged at all. Never mind....

The experience of the names is an emotion that unites us all.

Indeed it is the impact of the names that overwhelms. The names of the dead and missing, nearly 58,000 of them, carved into a wall of mirror-polished black granite folded at the center to form a wide splay, one leg pointing at the Lincoln Memorial, the other toward the Washington Monument. The wall itself is set into the earth, its top edge exactly level with the flat ground behind, the earth in front scooped away in a gentle slope to reveal the names. The scooping, ten feet deep at the point of the splay, slopes gradually upward to rejoin the surrounding land at the ends of the wall,

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FIGURE I. *Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Photo: Dolores Newman)*

some two hundred feet away. The feeling, upon entering the precinct of the monument, is one of descending into a shallow bowl in the earth, the ground held back by this tapering dam of black granite.

Private grief and public monuments

On my first visit to the memorial, walking that slow descent into the earth along the face of the wall, I too wept. It was indeed the names, the names beyond counting. As I walked, and stood, and moved on again, I passed and was passed by the people who had come that day to find the names of friends or kin, or simply to see this memorial to the war that had touched us all in some way or another. Those of us who had come to see simply stood and ran our eyes over the length and height of the wall. But those who had come to find—they had a more pointed mission. They could be seen kneeling or standing before one particular spot in the wall, staring long at one name out of the thousands, their eyes welling with tears. We others allowed a circle of distance around each of these solitary mourners lost in their thoughts, keeping our own shared thoughts to a quiet murmur.

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FIGURE II. *Visitors to Constitution Gardens Site (Photo: Dolores Newman)*

We talked, stranger to stranger, of the names—first of their number, but then of their arrangement—not alphabetical nor by hometown nor by military unit nor by any of those chance groupings by which we are arranged in life. Not by those, but by the final, personal ordering of the moment of death. The names begin on one side of the fold in the wall, with the first soldier lost in 1959. They continue in columns, moment by moment and year by year, out to the end of that wall, to resume at the far end of the other wall, continuing on until the last moment of the war in 1975, back at the fold where the sequence began, the last name joined to the first. We talked, in whispers, and pondered this, the way the names returned upon themselves, closing the circle they had formed in their progression outward and back.

And we realized, in that pondering, how the monument spoke to the memories of the private grievers. This wall of names arranged by date of death encompassed the private reality, and not the corporate enterprise, of war. That reality, for those kneeling in thought, must have been one of sequential loss, of one particular friend taken at one particular moment, over and again until the circle closed and all who had been sent away were gathered in again.

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Even those of us who sought no particular death found ourselves reading individual names and, unbidden, imagining the places and the circumstances of their deaths. When we encountered, in the seeming randomness, a sequence of alphabetical arrangement, we knew that here were the men of a single platoon, wiped out together in a single engagement.

So many moments! Each movement of our gaze was a movement through time. A glance up and down carried us through weeks. Walking the length of the wall carried us through months and years. We made that slow journey with faces turned toward the wall, toward the names; we could not look elsewhere. It was only as the wall slipped below eye level, as we ascended, that we were able to look around again at the surrounding land. Then we realized, in that looking, that we were slowly returning to level ground, slowly coming out from that reverie of loss.

In that ascent, through and out from time, we remembered the feeling of the war at home: the slow, almost imperceptible descent into the conflict, the equally slow—agonizingly slow—diminuendo by which we left. In that remembering, we realized anew that, whatever the character of our days at home, here was the character of time in Vietnam, lives taken one by one, moment by moment by moment.

After a long time, I walked away from the precinct of the monument and stood looking back at the milling crowd arrayed along its length, and I recalled the controversies that had surrounded its design. "A black ditch of shame," it was called, its V-shape a reminder of the years of protest. As I weighed those objections against my own deeply-touched emotions, the thought came to me, as it had to others, that surely this memorial, of such emotional power, had put those objections finally to rest.

But had it really? The objections to the monument were, in essence, that it did not glorify the war in ways that other monuments had—the Iwo Jima Monument being one frequently-cited example. Now clearly a monument equating Vietnam with World War II, implying that the Vietnam War had been conducted for the same noble purposes, had been supported with equal fervor, had had the same import for the people and the nation—such a monument would have been a sham, a lie. But behind that call for a glorification is the assumption that a monument—any monument—should make concrete some shared idea about the thing it commemorates, that a war memorial in particular should embody some resolved way of thinking about the war it commemorates. In short,

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a monument should *speak*. In that sense, the objections stand unaddressed: The Vietnam monument does not speak. Indeed the designer, Maya Ying Lin, has said that she intended a monument that "would not tell you how to think" about the Vietnam War.

To feel that a monument should speak seems a reasonable opinion to hold. But what follows from it? What is incumbent upon *us* to do if we are to have monuments—and, by extension, public buildings—that speak to us?

Reading and "re-knowing"

To answer such a question we must first ask how monuments and buildings once spoke when there were people to listen. Probably the most commonly-cited examples of buildings that speak are the great Gothic cathedrals, whose windows and statuary were "the bibles of the illiterate peasants." The idea that the iconographical decoration of Gothic churches was read "like a book" is certainly commonly held, but like many such ideas it is unexamined and, in this case, fundamentally wrong. How did people read those stained glass windows?

Take, for example, the famous windows at Chartres. In one window of the nave there is a panel depicting this scene: A man is kneeling with his head on a chopping block, and over him stands his executioner, sword upraised. But the executioner's attention is distracted: He is looking over his shoulder at a sheep that is butting him from the rear. Watching over this curious scene is another man, looking out from what appears to be a guard-box. What on earth (or in heaven) are we to make of this scene? The guidebooks, of course, can tell us. This is the story of Simon Magus, a false prophet who, according to legends current in Gothic Europe, competed with St. Peter for the attention of the early Christians in Rome. To prove his divinity, Simon Magus offered to have himself executed before the Emperor Nero. But before the blade fell, Simon changed himself into a lamb and so was saved. Knowing that, we can see how the window depicts the tale (and the humor with which it does so), but how would a person of the time, without a guidebook, have fathomed the window's message? He might have begun with the knowledge that each of the great windows in that section of the nave depicted stories of the life of an individual apostle. Looking up and down the height of this particular window, some image might have triggered the thought, "This window could be the one for the apostle Peter." Lighting then on the

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image of the lamb and the executioner, the peasant would have thought: "Yes, there is the story of Simon Magus. This must indeed be the window of Peter. Now what other stories of Peter are depicted in this window?"

This is a far cry from the way we read books. The method is more nearly one of formulating a hypothesis from one scanty piece of evidence and then testing that hypothesis against other pieces of evidence for confirmation or refutation. The crucial difference between icon-reading and book-reading is that icons do not do what books can do, which is to impart to us something we do not know. Rather, icons give us the scantest of hints—hints which, by a leap of the imagination, elicit from our memory something we already know. In contrast to book-reading, the power of icon-reading consists in letting us "re-know" something in a new, perhaps more profound, way. The point, though, is that the re-knowledge does not come easily to us, like words off a page. It requires work and speculative imagination.

And it can be done, even today, although the opportunities are extremely rare. One instance is in the narthex of St. Thomas Church in New York City, which was remodeled in the 1940s into a memorial for the dead of World War II. A visitor without a guidebook could know that the narthex is such a memorial by the lighted Book of the Dead in a side niche and by the coats of arms of the Allied powers set into the floor. But if the visitor were to play the part of modern-day Gothic peasant and look around him, he might notice, in the corners of the room, four carved brackets—one showing a man blowing clouds from his mouth, another bracket formed out of flame-like arabesques—and the hypothesis might come upon him that here were the four elements of ancient physics: air, fire, earth, and water. Checking out the other two corners would confirm his hypothesis, but if our visitor's imagination were truly working, he might make the leap between ancient physics and modern physics and, in that leap, come to re-know in a new and more profound way the manner in which World War II was finally won. That re-knowledge, thrust upon him in this place, would call upon him to contemplate his role, and the role of his church, both in that conflict and in the nuclear world that has existed since.

The language of icons

That is how a powerful icon speaks. And it is by that same process that buildings can communicate with us. Buildings can com-

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municate in at least four ways, each way in its turn being a little more meaningful and thus requiring of us a little more work of the imagination.

On the simplest level, a building can merely denote the identity of the institution housed inside. This denotation is often done with a coat of arms or some similar iconographical device. But it may also happen that the building itself is shaped to tell us those things. This shaping might be subtle, as at the Harvard Club in New York; the building is done in a brick Georgian style, anomalous for that part of Manhattan but reminiscent of much of the architecture of the Harvard campus. Or the shaping might be extreme, as in the case of the New York Yacht Club, where each of the main bay windows has the look of the stern of those eighteenth-century sailing ships familiar to us from movies like *Mutiny on the Bounty* or *Peter Pan.*

A building can also go a little farther and attempt to say something about what this institution "does for a living." Every city has such buildings—the headquarters for the light and power company adorned with Venetian lanterns, the old meat market with a frieze of bulls' and rams' heads, the newspaper building with its globe of the world. The Daily News Building in New York has such a globe, a huge contraption set in a well in the lobby, revolving slowly under a black glass dome of outer space—telling us clearly that the work of this institution is to bring the world to us.

A building can go one step farther and voice an ideology: It can propose to us what this institution means (or wants to mean) to society. Over the entrance to the same Daily News Building is an immense low-relief sculpture panel depicting multitudes of people doing their various jobs, with the inscription "Because He made so many of them." Clearly this newspaper has set an institutional goal for itself: It will not merely convey the news of the world, it will aspire to direct that news toward the common people, for whom God showed His love by making so multitudinous.

The final step in this progression is the building that propounds to us an aspiration that exists apart from an institutional "owner." In such a situation the building talks not only about the role an institution plays in society, but also about how society itself ought ideally to be organized, the ideas which ought ideally to govern society's operation. This is what a monument traditionally does, Buildings too can take on this aspirational role, as at Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia campus, where students and professors are grouped together around a space leading to the central

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library. Jefferson intended that this arrangement be not merely a model for the physical layout of universities, but that it stand as a model for how life in a university ought to be organized, with students and teachers meeting on common ground to share and increase knowledge. And by holding before us the accomplished fact of life lived according to such an ideal, the university would stand as an ideal toward which the society at large might aspire.

Repaying the imagination

But buildings only rarely get the chance to speak about the whole of society. This propounding of cultural ideals is more often the province of monuments. Take, for example, the Virginia War Memorial to the dead of the World Wars, which stands on a bluff above the James, the great river that traverses the length of the state. The memorial has the form of a high, wide corridor, roofed and open at both ends. One flank of the corridor, on the side away from the river, is solid stone; the other is completely glass, upon which are etched the names of all those who died in the wars. Through this glass wall of names one sees a broad sweep of the James, and in the distance the state's capital city. Set in the floor at the base of this glass wall are relics from each of the battles: a canteen from Chateau-Thierry, a shell casing from Iwo Jima, a bayonet from Normandy—the common equipment of common soldiers. Looking up from that detritus of war through the screen of names at the great river of the state, one again realizes that these people went to faraway places so that we, standing here, might continue to have and enjoy this beautiful land.

The memorial thus tells us not just *that* these people died, or even how or where they died. It offers us a reason *why* they died. To each of us who either feels the loss of a loved one or contemplates such a loss, it offers a pattern into which that loss can be fit and so made sense of and more easily lived with. That pattern does not take the form of a recounting of the facts of the war: We know, intellectually, the real nature of wars, just as we know the real nature of life in a university or of reporting in a newspaper. The pattern is, rather, an ideal about wars and sacrifice—an ideal state of affairs which daily reality will always fall short of, but which can serve as a standard, a yardstick upon which each remembered occurrence, in its near or far distance from the ideal, can be arrayed and so be felt to have a place, contributing in large or small measure to the attainment of that ideal.

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I cite this particular monument not because it is so distinguished (it is not) but because its message is so readily accessible to our ordinary understanding. It requires no esoteric knowledge, no difficult research for us to grasp and then to feel what is being symbolized here, only our common knowledge and our active imagination. But also required is that there be a graspable message there that *repays* imagination. When we think of recent monuments or memorials or public sculpture, the memory that most often comes to mind is not the experience of imaginative revelation but an opaque frustration. Recent public memorials and sculpture seem so often to take the form of abstract objects or minimalist shapes. We have all confronted such objects, and try as we might—staring long at them, walking slowly around or through them—our imagination draws a blank. We might notice an interesting pattern of shadows or a piquant play of shapes, but those impressions seem such meager fare, insufficient repayment for our efforts of imagination.

Take, for example, the monument erected in Dallas to commemorate the assassination of President Kennedy—a large hollow cube lifted off the ground and open to the sky, with a vertical slit cut out of the center of two opposite sides. We enter in through those slits, feel the enclosure and the sky, see the narrowed views of the scene where the murder took place. But nothing re-tells us of the terrible feelings we all shared on that day. There is no offered pattern by which we might make sense of those feelings, or draw some lesson or guidance or even solace from the events of that day. The monument, for all of its memorializing intentions, does not seem to be about the assassination of a President but about the feeling of enclosed space and the play of light on hard surfaces. The speaking it does is addressed not to our minds and hearts but to our bodies and eyes.

Our inarticulate arts

In that respect, this and other abstract monuments are not so very different from the modern buildings we encounter daily. There too the message being spoken is about shape and shadow, not about what institution is housed inside or what it does, much less what it aspires to. It is, in that precise sense, an *inarticulate* architecture, and the public environments that result are likewise mute: They do not tell us, as cities once did, of how our institutions relate to one another (those pregnant juxtapositions like that in

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New York where the homes of the leading newspapers glared across a park at Tammany-run City Hall). Our public spaces now speak only about the physical shapes of those spaces and the ways that light moves across and through them.

How did architecture get this way? The true answer to that question is complex, but in large part modern architecture followed the path blazed first by modern art. Like architecture, art before modernism spoke of human affairs. When one encountered a work of art, one would encounter (in addition to the play of shape and light) some puzzle of human conduct: What is happening in that scene? What would I do and think and feel if I were there? And what does that say about the way I live in the here and now?

But the moderns set themselves a different task. They wanted artworks that would not be *about* things in the world but would themselves *be* things in the world. They did not want to create scenes and shapes that reminded us of places and things we had previously encountered in the world; they wanted to present us with scenes and shapes wholly unlike any we had ever encountered, so that we could contemplate the invented qualities of those new works—shapes never before experienced, configurations of color and light never before seen. To accomplish this goal, art had constantly to contend with our propensity, ingrained through centuries of encounters with art, to try to link artworks with the remembered world. And so, one by one, art concocted strategies to thwart that propensity, to prevent us from connecting the art-experience with human experience. It does not go too far to say that art wanted to render itself irrelevant to human experience, so that we could more completely have and be moved by the art experience.

In at least part of this effort, art can be said to have succeeded. We do indeed no longer connect the experience of art with life as lived in the world. The idea that we would seek, in art, guidance for the conduct of human affairs—that proposition now sounds strange to our ears. The question that now arises, though, is: Have we, in this divorce, become able to attend more closely to, and derive sustenance from, the experience of shape and light that art offers? There the answer is equivocal. Some can and do derive intense feeling from the contemplation of form and color, but many people (in whose number I must count myself) have the feelings but find they are not deeply moved by them. What we find in the case of all but the most powerful abstract artworks is that the kind of feelings we get are not so very different from the feelings we get in the presence of the best graphic design—movie titles, say,

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or big magazine spreads. We get the visual, sometimes visceral, "rush" of a wholly new, never-before-experienced arrangement of color and form.

This experience leads many to feel that the frame of mind that takes in and appreciates the best graphics and product design is the appropriate frame of mind for "taking in" artworks. They know that they have gotten the full measure of the one; nothing tells them that they have not gotten the full measure of the other. Aestheticians have noted this phenomenon (European theorists call it "the consumption of culture"—treating art as if it were a consumer product). They have seen how easily artworks that try to become special, almost magical objects can become merely objects like any other. And they have carefully pointed out the cues by which we can know which works are fine art and which are mere graphics or packaging. But I, for one, cannot rid my mind of that Gothic peasant, and an art that, in its form, told one that here was an object to be pondered.

Our art, for so many years now, has not possessed that quality. It does not hold out to us recognizable puzzles from human experience that cause us to stop, ponder, and not rest until we can answer them. Nor do we encounter the questions that architecture, "Mother of the Arts," once raised. We now come to architecture with the same frame of mind that "takes in"—readies itself for a visceral impact and feels it has gotten full measure when that impact hits.

The meaning of monuments

Little wonder, then, that the sheer emotional impact of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial satisfies us. Not having the idea that artworks can provide guidance in human dilemmas, we do not sense the absence of such guidance here. We take from the monument not a resolution of our conflicting emotions over the war, but an intensified, vivified version of those emotions.

But is this, you must ask, so very bad? Is this not a sufficient role for a memorial? Or, at the very least, are we done any harm by such monuments, by such art? I cannot help but believe that our interests are indeed harmed when art abandons the field of human affairs, because that abandonment leaves the field in the sole possession of *words*. Having bought art's definition of itself, we can conceive of no other way to think about the conduct of our lives except with words.

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This is not to deny the power of words, but to recognize that thinking with words is only one of the ways we think. Not to avail ourselves of those other ways of thinking, to have our conduct determined by words alone, is to risk a way of life in fundamental conflict with what we are. Art—and in this context the art of monuments—can provide a counterbalance to the weight of words in our lives.

What monuments have traditionally done is embody an idea important to those who erected them. That is what Jefferson did with his idea of an ideal academic society, and what the builders of the Virginia War Memorial did for their ideas of war and sacrifice. But a monument endures beyond its time, holds that idea before us, in our time, and asks us to contemplate that idea—turn it over in our heads, stand it next to our own experiences and ask if it still applies. Do people and institutions act as they do out of allegiance to this idea? And if they do, do I want people and institutions to keep on doing those things? Do I want them to do those things out of allegiance to this idea, knowing what that might entail? And if people and institutions do not act in accord with this idea, would I wish them to? In short: Do I want this idea, and all it might entail, to be an operative force in our society?

Monuments confront us with that choice. They tell us that people like ourselves once chose to affirm a certain set of ideals, but in that telling, they remind us that we too must face the decision of which ideals to affirm. Monuments thus set before us the task of reassessing our values. And they do it by giving us both the means to criticize and the reason for doing so. By asking us to contemplate imaginatively the ideas they embody, monuments prod us to think through the implications of our social ideals. Through the free contemplation which they engender, we can know an idea more wholly—see more clearly and feel more deeply both the dangers and the glories to which it might lead. In that sensing of both danger and glory we have a surer means, a firmer basis for judging.

But in that sensing we also feel, if we are alive to it, the evanescence of an idea. For to sense the consequences of an idea is to realize that those consequences can only come to pass through our actions. And to realize *that* is to realize that, without our taking action, ideas engender nothing. Monuments tell us that the moment we become unwilling to do the actions that an idea entails, at that moment the idea dies: It becomes a "form," a thing to be paid lip service, or a target of cynicism.

In this call to contemplation and action, monuments put before

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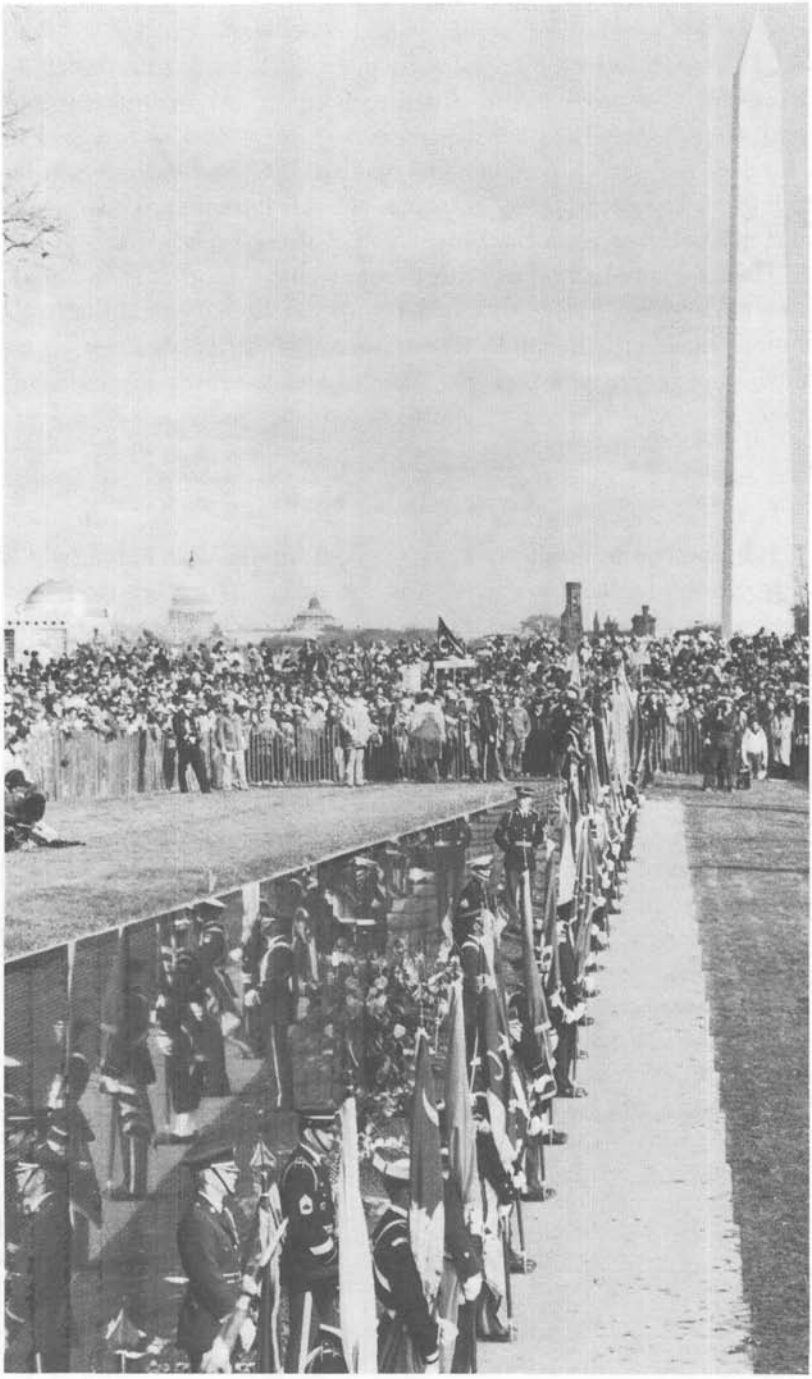

FIGURE III. *Dedication Ceremony, Veterans Day 1982 (Photo: Dolores Newman)*

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us the task of keeping our values and aspirations aligned with our desires and needs. When such monuments stand among us, they act as a counter to the expedience that can so dominate our daily lives—not as a goad, but as a call to hold on only to those values and aspirations whose consequences we freely choose to bear. In this very real sense, then, monuments call us to keep ourselves free: free from the demagoguery of ideas whose consequences we could not support, free from the brutish life of sheer expedience.

That is a very real necessity for monuments. And that is an equally real necessity for buildings that bespeak the nature of the institutions they house. A public environment that articulates ideas is an environment that lets us know which ideas we must support and, sometimes, which ideas we must contend against.

Living with our ideals

I did not quite finish my story of the Virginia War Memorial. A few years ago that memorial was extended, to include relics of the battles of Vietnam and the names of those Virginians who died there. Looking now, out through *those* names at the green banks of the James, a question arises: Did these soldiers really die that we might continue to have and enjoy this great land? And the answer, which we cannot avoid, is: No, they did not. But within that answer lies the true question to be asked: Is the defense of this land the *only* justification we will accept for sending young men and women to death in faraway places?

I am certain of the necessity for asking that question, continually and repeatedly throughout all our lives. But I am just as certain that I do not have the wisdom to frame an answer. Aided so far only by words, we have not been able to find an answer we can share. Perhaps if we could open ourselves to the kinds of thoughts that monuments can engender, our imaginations could supply an answer we could live with—and live by.

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Paris— the view from New York

NATHAN GLAZER

In the two weeks after my return from a year in Paris, the *New York Times* reported that there were some serious derailments on the New York City subway, trains were slowed in the August heat to prevent further derailments, and lines were closed for emergency repairs. There was a mass attack by young hoodlums on people attending a Central Park concert by Diana Ross, and an invasion of the Tavern on the Green to rob the well-to-do patrons of that landmark restaurant. There was an electrical blackout and great damage to electric generating facilities caused by a water main break in the garment district. There was the opening—yet again—of a bid for bus shelters, still not constructed after four or five years of controversy over improper political influence. (The bus patrons of New York City still wait in rain and snow or under a hot sun.) While New York was spared the horrors of another mid-summer garbage strike, I recalled that when I lived in New York a few years before, in a high-bourgeois area very much like my Paris neighborhood, the streets were regularly lined with masses of garbage in bursting plastic bags and an array of garbage cans of all types and sizes.

One could not help reciting the contrasts with the city I had just left. The Paris metro operates efficiently and quietly on rubber wheels. The construction that one runs into everywhere is not to

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repair decaying and dangerous rails and ties, but to extend and modernize the system, and to lay down new tracks. The streets of Paris are often turned up, just like the streets of New York; but in almost every case it is not to repair damage and breakdown, but to replace old facilities with new. Perhaps it is only a matter of luck—but one does not recall summer electrical blackouts in Paris (of course it is true there are fewer air conditioners, and thus no need for an enormous surge of power in the summer). Bus shelters are found almost everywhere in Paris, and have been for many years. Their sides are filled with useful maps and information—the routes of all the buses that stop there, in detail and spread in summary on a large-scale map of the system, maps of lines that operate nights, maps of the nearby neighborhood and where one can buy *carnets* (the books of tickets with magnetic strips good for all subways and buses, including suburban lines in the city). In contrast to the patron of the New York City buses, the Paris patron waits in comfort, with benches and protection from rain and sun, and he boards showing his monthly orange card (90 percent of the riders seem to use them). The occasional rider who must pay in coins or bills is accommodated by the bus driver. The garbage is put in uniform, covered gray and orange containers issued by the city of Paris, and built so that their tops fit into the trucks that collected garbage every morning of every day—indeed, one does not see filled containers past 8:00 a.m. Paris's squares and small parks are clean and flowers raised in the city botanical gardens are regularly put out in ravishing displays.

The city that "works"

Paris is a "city that works," and while explaining why would take more information than I could acquire in a year as a resident not involved in any formal study of the city, one must lay out the contrasts and ponder the problem. Why does Paris work as well as it does? I speak now of the ordinary facilities based on municipal public investment and services—transportation, garbage collection, utilities, parks, and open spaces. I will leave out crime and police services, because it is taken for granted, and understood, that American crime rates are peculiarly high, and that the lack of safety in New York and other American cites can scarcely be ascribed to inadequacies of policing as such. Further, as a capital, Paris can call on many more police, of more varied types, than New York can. The relative difference in crime and the sense of

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safety must be attributed to social factors for which, one assumes, no public administration can be held responsible. (It is possible that more important in affecting differences in crime rates are differences in powers of the police and in the operation of the courts. But I will take the difference in level of crime and sense of safety as a given, and consider other areas of difference.)

Let us begin with a few elements that cannot explain the differences between Paris and New York. Paris is big—as big as New York, if we consider the two agglomerations. They are roughly (depending on how we define their borders) of comparable size, wealth, and stage of economic development. It is true that the *city* of Paris, the city of the twenty *arrondissements*, within the lines traced by its nineteenth-century walls and now by the peripheral freeway that rings the city, is considerably smaller than the political entity of New York City—2.3 million people, compared to New York's seven million. This historic and political Paris, from the point of view of the function it serves and the image held of it in the metropolitan area, is roughly equivalent to Manhattan. When I speak of Paris, I will be speaking of this city, rather than the region, a city that comprises 20 percent of its regional population, against the more than half that New York City comprises of its metropolitan area. I am considering the central city, as we call it in the United States. To compare Paris with New York is, then, from the point of view of scale of the metropolitan region, and scale and functions of the inner city, not unreasonable, and indeed is often done. The Paris metropolitan district contains a population almost as large as New York's, producing as many workers requiring trips into a central business district, as much garbage, as many automobiles, as much need for public spaces, and so on, as New York. The differences are not differences of orders of magnitude.

There are differences, nonetheless. Paris closes down in August, as New York does not. Paris's climate does not call for air conditioning or snow removal—which is undoubtedly a help to city and private finances. Paris sharply limits the height of buildings, and so its central business district is spread over a larger area—a help for transportation. Paris's river is less an obstacle to traffic than New York's is. One can list other differences—and yet if one considers why Paris does so much better in creating the environment of a very large city and world capital than New York does, one cannot resort to any major difference in scale or wealth or geography.

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There once was another explanation of why Paris did better, one that will not hold much any more, if it held two decades ago: Paris is now a city almost as ethnically and racially mixed as New York. One will be surprised in the subways at the number of blacks, North Africans, and Asians. The population of the city of Paris is now one-fifth foreign (I speak of formal political status). But that understates its heterogeneity. There are many French citizens who are considered "foreign" because of race, accent, religion, name. And there are native "minorities" within Paris. After the municipal elections of 1982, *Le Monde* carried a front-page story on the Jewish vote. Apparently 10 percent of the voters of Paris (the city) are Jewish: One must conclude that if the average Frenchman's view of France as a homogeneous country still marks off France strongly from the United States, and Paris from New York, the reality of racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity brings Paris much closer to New York.

Professional expertise: "they try harder"

One needs some explanation: It is not the scale of the two cities, is no longer the difference in social composition, and is not particular advantages of climate and physical features. In 1978, a group of American urban experts, all based in New York, attended a conference in Paris with their French counterparts (or as close as one could come to French counterparts) to discuss the problems of Paris and New York. An interesting idea, and it begins to bring us closer to the unique characteristics that make Paris work so much better than New York. It turned out the American experts talked a good deal about Paris (as well as New York), while the French experts talked only about Paris—perhaps they were too polite. The title of the deliberations has a distinctly New York air —*Survival Strategies: Paris and New York*.[1] The French would never have dreamed of such a title. Their problem with Paris has been how to prevent it from threatening the survival of other French cities: *Paris and the French Desert*, as the title of a famous book pronounced.

The simple comparison of those who attended the conference underlines some of the key differences between the two cities. The Americans were Edward J. Logue, Eli Ginzberg, Ada Louise

[1] *Survival Strategies: Paris and New York* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1979). The conference was sponsored by French-American Foundation and the Council for Urban Liaison.

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Huxtable, Mitchell Sviridoff, Raquel Ramati, Franklin A. Thomas, Edward A. Costikyan, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and John P. Keith, President of the Regional Plan Association of New York. They are people who have been in and out of government, but not one is making a regular career as a professionally-trained person following his profession *in* government. The American participants included, as I count, only *one* professional planner. The French experts were mostly professional planners or administrators working on plans as civil servants. The Americans included a majority of people who work on social problems—minorities, race, unemployment. (They could have included a crime expert as well: The chairman of the New York City Planning Commission made his reputation in this field.) There were no equivalents on the French side.

The Americans deal with social problems, the French with physical problems. And understandably so: They have fewer social problems than we do. Trying to make use of their expertise on social problems (especially race), the Americans needled their French counterparts, suggesting in various ways that the French were ignoring issues and problems that would bring them the same degree of pain that plagues the American city. Edward Logue wrote:

> Most serious American urbanists believe that race, or rather the consequences of racial discrimination, is the central urban problem of our society, and they are not confident they have the answers. . . . The French have a very different concept of their race problem. The number and percentage of blacks and Arabs is comparatively small. . . . Since the phenomenon of a nonwhite sector of the work force is of relatively recent origin, they do not yet see it in its generational aspects. I believe our French friends thought we were just not well-informed when we pressed them on their race problem. For our part, we piously hoped we had laid a foundation for greater concern.

This issue came up again and again. After all, the Americans could clearly tell the French nothing about the *physical* planning of a world city; they *could* tell them about social problems. The French did not seem very interested. (Five years later, they would have been more interested.) The French did not tell the Americans what they thought of New York City; they simply described how they plan for Paris and the Paris region, how their ideas about planning have changed. The Americans were impressed. As Logue wrote: "there is no question that we found ourselves exposed to a program and *city* administrative arrangement which was clear

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about its values, its priorities, its resources, and its powers. This is something one can say about very few American cities and certainly not New York." And after describing the disaster that has struck American cities, and noting that "no riot has or will equal the devastation which has created the bombed-out areas of Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx," Logue concluded: "It is from this perspective that I look upon our French experiences. It is carefully considered. It is implemented. After a while they decide it is wrong. Carefully, professionally, they propose a new policy very different from the old one. It is adopted. It is financed. It is being implemented.

"They try harder. I like that."

Shared commitments in a decentralized system

As well he might. But just how they manage to do this is still something of a mystery. Clearly one must think of differences in government and administration to explain some of what we see. I have suggested, for example, that the Americans at this conference were men and women of varied skills, without governmental responsibilities, who may move in and out of government, and may occasionally hold positions of major significance, while the French delegation consisted of permanent civil servants of defined specialties and roles. One senses that this difference is important: If one had tried to find French equivalents to the American urban experts, one could find very few (one could find urban critics, but not as many who had also been major administrators and played key roles in government). If one tried to find American equivalents to the French participants, one would have to reach much further down the chain of administrative command. Our top administrators are politicians, or are politically appointed. The American civil servant who has a particular function has much less authority and much less experience at the highest levels of government than does his French equivalent. So should we begin by considering that France is a more highly-centralized country, with a powerful permanent civil service that produces a more coherent and less hobbled form of government than we have in the United States?

Perhaps. And yet experience in France modifies considerably the old picture of a highly centralized state, in which all power flows from the center through the appointed prefects, and in which local mayors and elected councils are, for good or ill, without

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power. Reading the newspapers, and the more sophisticated accounts, one finds that the notion of a centralized state that rides roughshod over local and partial interests, and implements the ideas of a central body of planners, is somewhat out of date. It may be the way things once happened, but now the reality is different: There are 38,000 communes in France, more local governments than exist in the United States. They maintain a good deal of autonomy. It is not easy to knock their heads together, or to reorganize them. Their formal powers may be small, but the mayor is often active in a national party, may be a deputy or even a minister, and thus has informal routes to represent his commune and its interests. A most interesting account of the building of the French new towns—one of those monumental projects that has proceeded at a rate that dizzies the American mind, moving from conception and plan to execution at a pace and on a scale for which we have no parallel—reveals how much attention must be given to the views of local communes. Local governments must be accommodated, and maintain their power in the new town. The part of the left-controlled commune that falls within the new town will build government-assisted low-cost housing, while the part of the right-controlled commune that falls within the new town will make its choice for privately-owned housing.

The scale and speed of execution are especially impressive. The first government document supporting the new towns policies came in 1965, large scale construction began in 1970, and by the late 1970s 20,000 new housing units and 1,500 jobs a year were being added to the new towns. The comparison with England's New Towns policies is revealing. In England, despite its apparently longer and stronger traditions of strong local government, the New Towns did ride roughshod over local government, since they were created as government corporations with wider powers than the French bodies had, and could act independently of local authorities.[2]

Clearly Paris has a somewhat different status. There are indeed 1,300 local governments in the Paris region that the major public planning authorities must consider, but Paris proper is only one commune, and was without any strong countervailing powers against central government until a 1975 law gave it a mayor. The first mayor of Paris was, and still is, Jacques Chirac, a contender for national power against both former President Valéry Giscard

[2] James M. Rubinstein, *The French New Towns* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

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d'Estaing, and present President François Mitterand. Until the middle 1970s, the national government, operating through its prefects and ministries and many other bodies, dominated the development of Paris. Its powers are considerably reduced now. Indeed, President Mitterand's plans for a great international exposition to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution were dropped in spring 1983, after considerable planning, because of Mayor Chirac's resistance to the exposition's cost. (The matter is more complicated: Perhaps President Mitterand, at a time of economic crisis, was also concerned with cost, but he had made it clear that the exposition would not go forward without the cooperation of the local authorities.[3]) The fact is that the great works of Paris today do go forward not simply because central government rules with no countervailing power—or at least, when one reviews the complex administrative arrangements that govern Paris and the Paris region, they do not give one that impression.

But these conflicts suggest one possible answer to the question of why Paris works: It works because people at the highest level of government—kings and emperors in the past, a President and a mayor who hopes to be President now—took an immediate and personal interest in Paris, made key decisions, and exercised their power to make Paris great, but also to make it work. Paris is of interest to the highest levels of government—and has been for at least 130 years, since Napoleon III and his Prefect Baron Haussmann took over the rebuilding of a largely medieval city that was marked by a few great monuments. Haussmann was denounced in his time as Robert Moses was in ours (and is still denounced by many, but by a declining number). Napoleon III took the initiative to rebuild Paris as a "modern" city, and appointed Haussmann. Note two features: the interest of the Emperor, who himself laid out some of the great avenues to be cut through Paris, which were to serve, among other functions, as access to the new railway stations; and the fact that he could call upon a regular civil servant of the Corps of Prefects, George Eugène Haussmann, who had the energy and skill to carry out the huge public works. Haussmann in turn could call on other regular public servants, government engineers, members of the Corps des Ponts et Chaussées, Adolphe Alphand and Eugène Belgrand, to carry out the great works of cutting avenues through the city, providing it with water and sewers, and with parks.

[3] For a fuller analysis see Julia Trilling, "Paris: Architecture as Politics," *The Atlantic* (October 1983).

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The French planning tradition

Paris is still, to an amazing degree, Haussmann's Paris. He served as Prefect of the Seine from 1853 to 1870, and the shape of the city, its great avenues, its parks, and its monumental underground works, are still in large measure those laid out or begun under him and continued by the Third Republic.

One authority asserted in 1971, while Paris was undergoing vast rebuilding, that 60 percent of the buildings and streets of Paris were built in Haussmann's time—certainly an exaggeration.[3] But it is true that the only major addition to Paris's equipment and facilities until World War II was the Metro. Its pattern of open spaces is still, in large part, Haussmannian. Paris as a city of trees and greenery is dominated by the great avenues, even more than by the modest parks Haussmann and his associates were able to lay out—though all the substantial parks of Paris (Monceau, de Montsouris, des Buttes-Chaumont) were laid out in his administration. (The other large open spaces of Paris—the Esplanade of the Invalides, the Tuileries and the Champ-de-Mars—are the heritage of Louis XIV and Louis XV.)

Haussmann's work may still have left Paris deficient in open space by some international standard, but what it has is primarily due to that phenomenal burst of city shaping between 1850 and 1870. And the great avenues, which leveled so much of medieval Paris, served not only as roadways, but also gave Paris a *sense* of openness and greenery.

The design, laid out for the city by public servants under the authority of the chief of state, has had remarkable staying power, has accommodated the building of systems of public transportation unknown in the time of the designers, and has even been able to survive the devastating impact of the automobile. Certainly this is an amazing feat of city planning, even more amazing because it cannot be attributed to any preternatural insight or genius.[5] Rather, both in the past and today, two elements seem to mark the planning and building of Paris and its government: Interest and involvement at the highest levels of government, and a permanent and high-level civil service. But these alone can also be

[4] Howard Saalman, *Haussmann: Paris Transformed* (New York: George Braziller, 1971).

[5] Paul Gagnon points out that the massive underground works for sewers and water permitted the installation of new utilities—gas, electricity, telephones—and their modernization with less disruption, and that in general the *initial* investment in urban equipment is higher in Paris than is common in the United States.

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a recipe for disaster. One must add a third element: The ongoing tradition of French planning and building, derived from the royal works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This tradition grew up in the course of building palaces and gardens, rather than cities, but its principles were then adapted to cities. And until the last three decades, these principles of planning have retained their hold on all the powers responsible for Paris, and in some measure still do.

The trademarks of the French garden and urban planning tradition are formalism, symmetry, long vistas, and the grand scale. Nature is sharply disciplined: Avenues of trees are set out in straight lines, roads cut through forest or medieval city straight as an arrow, artificial pools and canals are edged in straight courses of stone set in geometrically regular forms. It is a far cry from the American or English idea of a proper approach to nature, devoid of romanticism, grave and sober. It has not attracted those with democratic and romantic instincts, yet the French remained committed to it through five monarchs, two emperors, and five Republics.

Napoleon III had been taken by the very different style of English gardens, and they influenced the planting and design of the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes, and of the smaller parks within Paris, which were laid out in imitation of the romantic vision of organic nature, rather than in the formal lines of French gardens. But the great avenues ran straight as an arrow, framing vistas and important buildings, and on a monumental scale. In time, the sidewalks were cut back to accommodate automobiles, and rows of trees were cut down. And yet Paris remains still so green! It is a phenomenon of planning. Of course, the losses distress the observers and lovers of Paris, yet even the complaints attest to Paris's superiority: Only 27.5 percent of Paris's 1,300 kilometers of streets, complained Bernard LaFay in 1975, are planted. That "only" seizes the eye, and produces a sigh in the breast of the New Yorker. Paris, it seems, has only 1.4 square meters of park per inhabitant—compared to 5.5 for New York, 9 for Rome and London, 25 for Vienna, 50 for Washington—but it makes a marvelous display with those modest meters.

Presidents and their projects

Though battered—as what would not be?—by the inroads of modernism in planning and architecture, and the drastic impact

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of modern technology, the official interest at the highest levels, committed and able civil servants, and a 300-year-old tradition of formal design, still shape the design of Paris, and have prevented the worst from happening.

It is the first that still strikes the visitor as being uniquely French, and certainly quite far from American experience. Much of the history of Paris in the past 20 years has been determined by the French presidents, inheritors of a tradition of centralized power which has always concerned itself with the city. It is President Mitterand himself, we read in the newspapers, who has selected the winner of the international competition for a great complex of structures to house two ministries and a center of communications to be built at La Défense. This major complex will complete a monumental axis that has been under construction for 300 years, and runs from the Louvre, through the Tuileries and the Champs Élysées, through the Arc de Triomphe. In the French context, it is taken for granted that one will have to take account of how the monumental complex will look when viewed through the Arc de Triomphe. It is also President Mitterand who chooses the winner of the international competition for a new opera house at La Bastille. And it is he who determined that an international competition should be held for the last open space in Paris that can accommodate a park, at La Villette in the northwest.

How many of these decisions are *his*, and how many those of his advisors, it would be hard to tell—one must await memoirs. And yet he takes the responsibility, and personally makes the decision (guided, it is true, by advisory bodies of architects and planners). And much of the recent history of Paris can be told in terms of his predecessors' actions. Thus it was President Pompidou who determined that Paris should be brought into the automobile age, called for freeways on the Left and Right Banks, and approved the introduction of high towers into Paris. It was he who determined that a great center of contemporary art should be built on the cleared area of the Plateau Beaubourg, and refused to stop the destruction of Les Halles. It was his successor, President Giscard d'Estaing, who stopped the building of freeways and towers, determined that the proposed tall international trade center on a part of the Les Halles site should be replaced with a park, determined that the Gare d'Orsay should be a museum of the nineteenth century, and that the great unused structure at La Villette, designed to serve the *abattoirs* of the area, should be an enormous museum of science and technology.

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Paris has had a mayor since 1976, and President Mitterand does not have as wide a stretch of power as did his predecessors. He must share his power over Paris with Mayor Chirac, who has national ambitions and who also builds *his* reputation on the beautification of Paris. But Mitterand too will leave his mark in Paris. One learns that the competition for the public park around the enormous new museum at La Villette was instituted by President Mitterand because he did not like the decision made by his predecessor—or perhaps because he wanted to set his stamp on one of the great enterprises that would be completed under his *septennat*, as the French call the seven-year presidential term. La Villette was an area of slaughterhouses, and stands in a working class district. It is the last major space available for a park in Paris. Certainly one understands that the president of the left would not want the only major park created in Paris since the time of Baron Haussmann to be built to the design chosen by the president of the right.

Pompidou, Giscard d'Estaing, and Mitterand, under a democratic and bounded state, with incredibly more complex administrative arrangements, seem to follow in the line of Louis XIV and Louis XV, Napoleon I and Napoleon III, in taking a direct interest in Paris and its grand design. Of course one interest is in making Paris the greatest city in the world. Another is to glorify themselves. But these grand personal motives are also combined with the ambition to make Paris work.

This must be a key to the matter. Can one imagine President Reagan deciding on the design of the new Asian and African wing of the Smithsonian, or Mayor Koch on the design of the new convention center of New York?[6] In Paris, one cannot imagine otherwise. The Presidents celebrate themselves through great works, and the Mayor of Paris establishes his reputation on the beautification of the city, on making it work. This is not to deny that France is a welfare state and that more than great works of urban

[6] From a recent exhibit in Washington on Lafayette Square—which sits right in front of the White House, the President's front yard, so to speak—one learns that some presidents did concern themselves with its design, particularly when it was proposed to tear down the pleasant mixed rows of nineteenth-century town houses for a government office building. President Roosevelt prevented the demolition of one row for a new State Department building. President Kennedy (even more so, his wife) prevented their demolition for huge new executive office buildings, and was eventually decisive in getting an architect, John Carl Warnecke, who worked out a design that saved the town houses and placed the massive bulk of the new buildings behind them. It is my impression that this kind of intervention is exceptional.

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design are necessary to a president or a mayor. But their achievements and satisfactions are also found in areas that, in this country, we leave to commissions, to bureaucrats, to private funding.

We do have some parallels. Governor Nelson Rockefeller set his personal stamp on the design of Albany, alas. But he was considered an exception in this respect, and perhaps it was his private fortune and the private Rockefeller role and experience that led him to undertake the extravagant and awful Albany Mall. It turned out that either the level of design available, or the taste of those making choices, had undergone an unimaginable decline between the time of Rockefeller Center and the Albany Mall, or the Albany campus of the State University of New York. In contrast, the involvement of French emperors and presidents was not exceptional—it was expected. But the personal involvement of the head of state operated within a tradition of design which helped to avoid the worst, at least within historic Paris.

The tradition itself, upheld by architects, planners, the public, and bureaucrats, would reassert itself if choices strayed too far. Thus it is now accepted that Pompidou, with freeways and skyscrapers inside Paris, was imposing solutions and designs that contradicted 300 years of development in Paris: There was a roar of protest from architects, urbanists, and other Parisians against the destruction of the wonderful iron and glass sheds of Les Halles, against the destruction that would be caused to the complex patterning of the banks of the Seine by a Left Bank freeway. Giscard d'Estaing stopped these projects, and reversed the course. Of course presidents, like other democratically-elected leaders, are responsive to public opinion; my point is that they do not abdicate, that they operate within a long tradition in which they are expected to make choices and decisions. And they have at hand administrative structures that can implement decisions, and a tradition of urban design that, with whatever aberrations, seems to weigh on and affect all the participants, leading to results that the world admires.

Who spends what—and how

Is there a simpler answer? Money is part of the story. Yet just how to analyze what is spent on Paris is extremely difficult. As a national capital, one thinks, a great deal of money is poured into Paris. It has long been believed that Paris is favored over provincial cities in facilities. The government and citizens of Paris no longer

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think so. Its new, very expensive metro extensions are matched by new metros in Lyons and Lille. Its new museums are matched—on a lesser scale—by elegant new museums in the major provincial cities. Studying a recently-published book comparing the government and finances of Paris, London, and New York, one is struck by the similarity of problems and questions, but further by the difficulty of asserting in any clear and unambiguous way that the national government in France spends proportionately more on Paris than our federal government spends on New York. One wishes there were tables comparing how much each city raises from its own resources, how much of its budget is paid for from central government sources, and where the money goes. But it would take a major research project to reduce the complexities of the budgets of these great cities to any comparative form. They have very different ways of paying for transport, police, education, social services, and major construction projects, and the differences are so great that it is hard to say unambiguously that Paris gets more than New York. One is struck by the fact that a great deal of information is presented in this French work on the New York City budget, very little on the Paris budget or budgets. Is this availability of comprehensible information on the financial condition of New York City owing to the recent New York City financial crisis and the number of oversight bodies and research groups that now monitor New York City government? One would think it easier to compare, not the money spent and its sources, but the output of services, as measured, for example, in the number of employees devoted to different tasks. But even that is not easy. One finds only one clear area in which Paris is much better served than New York. Paris deploys far more police: 35,000 in the Prefecture of Police (which still operates under a separate, state-appointed Prefect), for a city of 2.3 million![7] New York manages with

[7] See Bertrand Chardon, *Gouverner les Villes Géantes: Paris-Londres-New York* (Paris: Economica, 1983). Chardon attempts no comprehensive comparison, but other figures of numbers of employees are of interest, though they all raise questions. Chardon indicates 150,000 employees for the city of Paris, far more (taking comparative size of population into account) than one finds in the city of New York. He reports 35,000 employees for the city (*Mairie*), 5,000 for the Department of Paris, co-extensive with the city, 45,000 for *assistance publique*, 25,000 for "*services divers*" (p. 199). Elsewhere he lists no less than 50,000 state employees who exercise functions that relate directly to Paris: in education, sanitary and social affairs, postal services, etc. (p. 131). It is because different services are provided by different levels of government that any direct comparison of the budget(s) of Paris with those of New York is not helpful. In any attempt to determine whether Paris spends more on the city than New York, one would have to take account of these services, some of

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25,000 for a city of 7 million. Of course the Paris police also serve the great concentration of central government buildings, and perform functions (for example, issuing the documents that all Frenchmen and residents of France carry) the New York City police do not, but this can explain only a small part of the disparity.

Is there a great disparity in other areas? I have not found the evidence, but it may be so. So, indecisively, I conclude that perhaps the state in France spends more to support basic urban services in Paris than the federal government and New York State do for New York City. Perhaps Paris works better because it puts more money and people into the job of making a city work, and so its streets are paved, its mass transportation is efficient, comfortable, and clean, its garbage is collected and does not litter the streets, and its parks are well maintained. In short, all the elements that create a better ambience for urban life, and that depend on money and services, are better provided in Paris. I suspect that when all the research is done this will explain part of the reason Paris works so well.

But the issue, I think, is not simply more money—New York City's budget provides $2,500 of services for every man, woman, and child in the city, and I truly doubt that Paris provides much more than that. I suspect the answers will be in *where* the money is spent. Paris spends its money on "hard" services: the metro and the new high-speed underground, collecting the garbage, improving the streets, keeping up the parks and open spaces. New York spends a higher proportion of its on "soft" services: welfare, social services, education, criminal justice. By "hard" services I literally mean expenditures on concrete, streets, trucks, flowers, and planting. By "soft" I mean those services meant to improve people by education, advice, or correction. (Admittedly there is no absolute distinction.)

Of course, it is understandable why there should be this disparate distribution. We have more social problems, and we try to deal with them by the only methods we know. But we do not do very well with them. If we shifted some of the money from "soft" to "hard" social services we might even affect some of the social problems. We might provide more jobs for those who do not have them, improve the morale of those who must live in

which in New York are under the city, some of which, as in Paris, are central government functions (for example the post office). The task is one that requires a major research undertaking, which I have not undertaken, nor has anyone I have discovered.

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the unkempt and crumbling parts of the city. One hesitates to press this forward as any practical solution; municipal workers simply get too much money to permit much expansion of their numbers. Which leads to a final, unscientific observation: In Paris, parks are kept clean and garbage is collected, one notes, mostly by dark-skinned immigrants. One suspects they are not paid very much. And perhaps this permits a greater return for expenditure in those "hard" services in which unskilled immigrants can be employed. In the United States, jobs collecting the garbage are too well-remunerated to be given to immigrants. As a result, we have few doing it, and we do a worse job of it.

"Build the city on top of the city"

A tradition of urban design and a high level of public social services may not seem to have much is common, but they do. It is the public services that make the design work: replacing the trees that cannot withstand Paris's atmosphere, putting in and replacing flower beds, maintaining the small parks, redoing the small squares with their few benches, maintaining the strips of park along the Seine. But there is a design with which to work. Of course, the design is not only the result of human foresight, ingenuity, talent; it is the result of the layering of history, in which accident and organic growth alternate with grand schemes. Writing in the previously-mentioned conference report on Paris and New York, a French architect, Antoine Grumbach, demands: "Build the City on Top of the City." Do not wipe out its physical history for some presumed modern advantage; save its past, build in the interstices. Obviously this cannot be done in the huge new housing developments that have accommodated the enormous population growth of Paris outside the city, and that respond to the demand for greater living space and new facilities. They have overwhelmed the little villages for which they are named. But in Paris the errors of total demolition have been fortunately few—and have aroused sufficient opposition when they have happened.

Haussmann was denounced for the brutality of his remodeling of Paris. But now, with our interest in the preservation of a past whose techniques, talents, and orientations we can never recover, it is apparent that behind the Haussmannian avenues, with their great widths, their many rows of trees, and their vistas, medieval Paris remained. How fortunate to have had a rebuilder whose interest was in imposing grandeur and efficiency over a complex

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pattern, rather than wiping the slate clean, as modern urban renewers seem to have preferred, and substituting a design that produces no grandeur and only marginal and doubtful efficiency.

> It apparently never occurred to either Napoleon or Haussmann, in their most extravagant dreams of demolition, to pull down all of old Paris in order to rebuild it anew. [It did occur to Le Corbusier.] They wanted to improve the city, not destroy it. What lies beyond the new boulevards was neither the 'appalling disorder,' nor unspeakable slums, but the tightly knit, highly organic, and lively fabric of the old town, which was just as essential to the everyday life of all Parisians as were the new boulevards. After all, the upper middle class bourgeois did not live by champagne and lobster alone, but by bread, sausages, and red wine as well, and plain cotton goods, old books, and the products of artisan labor and small shopkeepers . . . these items were not to be had in the expensive new stores and cafes along the boulevard. Rents and overhead were much too high. . . . [But they] were to be found just around the corner in the narrow streets and old houses left standing behind the great streets. . . .[8]

How striking the contrast with the rebuilding of recent years which has demolished some of the old areas of Paris! Paris has its planning disasters, in which a historically-created complex of streets and houses, improvable by introducing more water and bathrooms and kitchens, was leveled for modern towers and streets. Norma Evenson describes "The Passing of the Rue Nationale," on the basis of the work of Henri Coing, and it seems a tragedy similar to that chronicled by Herbert Gans in his study of the razing of the West End of Boston (*The Urban Villagers*).

The Rue Nationale ran near the Place d'Italie in the 13th *arrondissement*, one of the "unhealthy blocks" that for decades planners had hoped to level. The story is almost too familiar to bear repeating. The complex physical texture that had developed over a century sheltered an equally complex, and unreproducible, social life. We find the same "urban village" we also find in British and American working-class districts, and the same destruction of both the physical fabric—created and shaped by individual decisions into a rich environment no planner or architect could ever duplicate—and the social fabric, equally built up out of elements that social workers cannot recreate.

> Living in close quarters made it necessary for neighborhoods to maintain good relations . . . neighborly relations often went far beyond the minimum. 'In case of trouble, our building becomes a real community;

[8] Saalman, *Haussmann: Paris Transformed*, p. 114.

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> I really saw this when my father died, and my wife was confined. . . .' Relations among housewives became particularly intimate, with the common courtyard becoming a place of frequent encounter. Naturally, with shared toilets and water taps, with windows closely overlooking neighbors, with children playing together in the courts, frequent meetings were inevitable. . . . In spite of the bad conditions in the buildings, many residents bitterly regretted the demolitions. . . . One could frequently hear in the cafes such remarks as: 'Why tear down all this? It was beautiful before, our Rue Nationale.'[9]

One looks in sorrow at the pictures in Norma Evenson's book. In place of 48 cafes, the new plan provided for one. Ten bakeries were replaced by two, 26 butcher shops by eight, and 29 grocery stores by five.

Planned formality and unplanned complexity

The design of Paris consisted of the formal new laid over the organic old. Haussmann's indifference to providing directly for the welfare of the poor may have been to their advantage: His plan destroyed fewer of their houses and environments, and his massive works provided them with jobs. The housing left behind, everyone knows, was awful: shared toilets, water taps, no bathrooms. But the solution to that was not demolition, but the prosperity that finally came to the working classes of France, and the establishment of a welfare state, in the post-World War II period. Prosperity made it as easy to improve these deficiencies with minimal destruction of the old physical and social fabric, as to demolish and build anew. The same subsidies could have been available for renovation. It is true in either case that the increasing attractiveness of Paris to those with more money eventually would have forced out many of the Parisian shops, small manufacturing plants, and working-class families. Paris was not immune to the general circumstances that affect the lives of great cities, but it was scarcely necessary for public authorities to spur the process on.

What was striking in the texture of Haussmannian Paris was the interplay between planned formality and unplanned complexity, as if the baroque city and medieval city lived together in useful symbiosis, the great spaces and the *medina* living cheek by jowl. Certainly this is what still gives Paris, even after so much rebuilding, its enormous attractiveness for walking, for living, for

[9] Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change, 1878-1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 257-258.

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watching. There is nothing so attractive as medieval and organic texture once the filth has been moved out, the garbage has been collected, transportation in and out has been improved, and the inhabitants have risen from begging and penury to decently-paid work. The social side is generally the part that has to be attended to in the urban slum: It was well attended-to in postwar Paris. As a result, less public attention to the physical texture was needed —in many cases, as in that of the Rue Nationale, it got far more than it needed.

Once prosperity comes to historic cities, one becomes aware of the touches of vernacular wisdom that present-day architects find so hard to introduce, working as they must on large scales, without artisans, dependent on an elaborate subdivision of specialists and labor, using massive machinery and manufactured elements not easily adapted to specific circumstance. Consider the court that creates an inner quiet area away from the busy streets, and that is an almost universal feature in the old Paris apartment house (whether pre-Haussmann, Haussmann, or post-Haussmann). The modern apartment house, of course, cannot manage to introduce a court—it needs too great an expanse of floor for uniform treatment, too great an economy in stairs and elevators to be able to wrap an apartment house around an eccentric space. Modern building cannot commonly adapt, as the French apartment house does, to the most amazingly shaped sites—sites that nevertheless were treated with a symmetrical facade that did not break the street line, and with an inner court for many of the windows to overlook, achieving blessed relief from traffic noise.

This complex pattern offered other virtues. Fragments remain of private gardens from Paris's many convents and monasteries (or, in the more-favored, Western parts, royal and aristocratic gardens), gardens that many people could see, if not enter. Again, a delightful return from a complex history. In the heart of the great block in the 13th *arrondissement* formed by the Boulevard Port-Royal, the Rue de la Glacière, the Boulevard Arago, and the Rue de la Santé, there lies the enormous garden of an Augustinian convent, overlooked by many hundreds of windows from the huge apartment houses (many post-World War II) which form a solid edge to the block. No one walking along the streets could be aware of the pleasantness that lies within, with birds singing and flowers blooming, and dark-clad nuns occasionally walking along the paths.

From the design point of view, Paris worked—and much of it still

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works—because it provided a satisfying combination of the kind of city that no one can design, but only the thousands of decisions made in a history of centuries can create, and the kind of human intervention which produced a totally different effect of grandeur and control. The Haussmannian boulevards are as satisfying as the complex texture that lies behind them—though there are those who strongly prefer one to the other.

As for "open space," Parisians still complain about how little there is. But Paris puts on a grand show with its 1.4 square meters per inhabitant. How does it manage such a show? By dispensing with the large parks that do not exist and cannot be created within Paris, it does, with the modest spaces available, almost everything one would want done with green and open space. The boulevards themselves, even in their sadly reduced state to accommodate more traffic, are something like strip parks, with two or more rows of trees planted in earth, not concrete. (Alas, they are horribly soiled by dog droppings, the one element of urban disorder that Paris displays more than most other cities.) The strips along the Seine are beautifully designed and landscaped, providing sudden release from the noise and presence of the city. The larger open spaces offer the very different charms of the romantic landscape of Les Buttes-Chaumont and the park-like Monceau and Montsouris. Paris, it, seems, can create romantic gardens in very small spaces. One can descend into the gardens around the Grand Palais, or the Chaillot, and discover waterfalls, rustic bridges, and little thickets, all the elements of an Olmsted park, in the heart of the city. This is on a handkerchief-sized scale compared to Central Park or Prospect Park, but if one aim of such landscape is to provide contrast and relief from the city of stone, even these fragmentary acres do it. And of course there are the contrasting royal spaces set down in strict formality: the Tuileries, the Luxembourg. The contrasts in the residential pattern between French formality and medieval complexity are mirrored by the open spaces, with their contrast between baroque vistas and English and romantic landscapes.

Design, commitment, and resources

Beginning these scattered thoughts, I said I would leave out one element—the level of crime and civility. But safety and civility directly affect what one can do with, and in, open spaces. Parisians complain about what has happened to their city. *Insécurité* (mean-

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ing domestic, not international) was a major issue in the municipal elections of 1982. One reads advertisements everywhere for armoring one's door and introducing burglar alarms, still primitive by American standards. The rate of burglary apparently approaches American levels. Paris is not as homogeneous as it was, and the public discipline maintained when almost everyone is of the same culture—in which older people can discipline children, and youth can be shamed by a look or a word—no longer is what it was. But on one score, Paris still does well. There is public civility. The parks are well used, but one sees little vandalism or graffiti (what little exists tend to be political rather than "expressive" or destructive). Even the new apartment houses that have been springing up and changing many quarters show a concern for public planting and greenery that reflects not only taste, but also the knowledge that shrubs will not be torn up and vandalized.

But in the end one goes back to a few key elements: the history of urban design; the attention paid at the highest levels of government; perhaps the resources poured into adding to and maintaining the public equipment of the city. This is what stands out in Paris.

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The American public space

J. B. JACKSON

THOSE of us old enough to remember what America was like a half century ago have lived through a significant but largely unnoticed development in our landscape. By that I mean not the growth of our cities but a development that came about largely as a consequence of that growth: the great increase in the number and variety of public places all over the nation.

A public place is commonly defined as a place (or space) created and maintained by public authority, accessible to all citizens for their use and enjoyment. This tells us nothing about the different ways in which we use and enjoy them, nor about the different types of public involved, but we have only to look about us to see that they are often outside the center of town and even in the open country. Many have an educational purpose: historic zones, outdoor museums, botanical gardens. And more and more spaces are being designed to give us a brief experience of nature: hiking trails and wilderness areas and beaches, for example. When we include among the newer public spaces the parking lot, the trash disposal area, and the highway, it is evident that the public is being well provided for, not only as far as places for enjoyment are concerned, but for their use as well.

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Implicit in the word "public" is the presence of other people. We know better than to resent that presence; they have as much right to be there as we have. Just the same, it is characteristic of many modern public spaces that contact between persons is likely to be brief and noncommital. Indeed, when the public is too numerous we are made uncomfortable. We did not come here for what an earlier generation called "togetherness," we came for an individual, private experience—a sequence of emotions, perceptions, sensations, of value to ourselves. This is not to say that we are unfriendly, merely that we do not necessarily associate every public place with social intercourse. We assume, in fact, that there are special places appropriate for that. Yet when we look for them today we find they are few.

Civic space

Much has changed in America since the time when *every* public space was intended to be the setting for some collective, civic action. I think it can be said that beginning in the eighteenth century every public space—every piece of land controlled by the authorities—was meant to serve a public institution rather than to serve the public as an aggregate of individuals. In the newer planned towns of New England an area of public land was set aside for the support of the local church and its preacher, though not for public use. Section 16 in the townships created by the National Land Survey of 1785—the only designated public space in the township—was to support a local school. Hence its name: school section, still a feature of the western landscape. Communities more urban in character recognized the need for public spaces that the public could use, but only for the benefit of the community at large. The newly created towns of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century almost invariably contained well-defined public places for the market, the drill field, the wharf, the "established" church, as well as places for a college or academy, and of course for public celebrations and public assembly. A civic function characterized them all; people were present in them to perform some public service or play some public role.

Public is a word without mystery: It derives from the Latin *populus*, and means belonging to or characteristic of the people. A public space is a people's space. But "people" as a word is less obvious. With us it simply means humanity, or a random sample of humanity, but until well into the nineteenth century it meant a

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specific group: sometimes the population of nation or a town, sometimes the lowest element in that population, but always an identifiable category. Thus a common phrase in England was "the nobility, the gentry, and the public." People in this sense implied an organization and a territory; and as an organization it had an organizing or form-giving authority.

Perhaps it can be said that, as a noun, "public" implied the population, or the people, while as an adjective it referred to the authorities. Thus a public building in the eighteenth century was not a place accessible to all, for their use and enjoyment, but was the working or meeting place of the authorities.

This strictly political meaning of the word helps us interpret the kind of public place or square found in most of the new towns and cities in colonial and post-colonial America. The invaluable collections of town plans in three books by John Reps show in some detail how early planners and promoters emphasized the importance of public places.[1] Each community, each town was given a grid plan or a variation on a grid, and though many of them were little more than a cluster of square blocks, invariably there was a symmetrical array of (proposed) public buildings on a piece of public land—courthouse, market, jail, etc.

It is interesting to see how faithful colonial and frontier America was to the early Renaissance practice of according more dignity to the building than to the square in front of it. Our own perception, of course, is the opposite: In our love of open spaces we see the building as "facing" the square, the square as the focal point in the urban composition. The eighteenth-century belief was that the square, however large and imposing, derived its dignity from its association with the building, and was in fact merely the place where the inhabitants gathered to pay homage to the authorities within. Many town maps indicate proposed smaller squares, inserted into what would eventually be built-up residential areas. These were undoubtedly meant to be surrounded and dignified by public buildings, as William Penn had proposed for the four minor squares in his plan for Philadelphia. It was only in the nineteenth century that these small squares were seen and treated as parks, and this change from concentrating on the public building to concentrating on the public space would eventually produce public

[1] John Reps, *The Making of Urban America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), *Tidewater Towns* (Williamsburg VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1972), *Cities of the American West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

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places bearing little or no aesthetic relationship to their urban surroundings.

Few of these neo-classical towns ever grew to resemble their paper prototypes. Many grew in an entirely unpredicted way: into monolithic compositions of identical blocks, as in Chicago, which are ideally suited to the purposes of the real estate speculator. Others did not grow at all. But their plans are no less interesting for that. They are diagrams, provincial and greatly simplified, of what Americans wanted in the way of towns: a rational, egalitarian, political ordering of spaces and structures, a sharp division between public and private, so that spaces for recreation or non-political, non-civic functions were left to the private sector to provide as best it could. The only truly public, or people's, space was the large central public square where all qualified citizens came together: a vast architectural roofless room, a stage, where all acted out their familiar assigned roles. And this, I think, is what really distinguished the traditional public space from our contemporary public space. Two centuries ago, despite the Revolution, it was still widely believed that we were *already* citizens (to the extent that we could qualify) when we appeared in public. We knew our role, our rank and place, and the structured space surrounding us merely served to confirm our status. (Much as in certain denominations we are members of the community of Christians from the moment of baptism; our subsequent participation in certain rites within the church simply *confirms* our permanent religious status.) But now we believe the contrary—that we *become* citizens by certain experiences, private as well as public. Our variety of new specialized public spaces are by way of being places where we prepare ourselves—physically, socially, and even vocationally—for the role of citizen.

Decline of the square

There are still many among us who hold that our public spaces should perform the same civilizing, political role. Nevertheless, as the nineteenth century progressed it became evident that the public square was losing prestige. During the Revolution the centers of popular excitement had been Faneuil Hall, Independence Hall, and the New York Common. But when political oratory and political demonstrations went out of fashion, the public began to frequent the busier streets, the tree-lined promenades, and the waterfront. Other developments gave the centrifugal movement further impetus. Middle-class families felt the attraction of the suburbs or

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of the independent homestead. Newcomers, many from overseas, had no sentiment for the established customs, and in newer parts of town evangelical churches competed with the established church in the center. The coming of the railroad and the factory and the mill shifted leisure time activities to the less built-up outskirts of town; and finally the public buildings themselves ceased to be the locus of real power, and gradually became office buildings for the bureaucracy. In almost every American town the traits Sam Bass Warner has identified with mid-nineteenth century Philadelphia became more and more prevalent:

> The effect of three decades of a building boom . . . was a city without squares of shops and public buildings, a city without gathering places which might have assisted in focussing the daily activities of neighborhoods. Instead of subcenters the process of building had created acres and acres of amorphous tracts—the architectural hallmark of the nineteenth and twentieth century American big city. . . . Whatever community life there was to flourish from now on would have to flourish despite the physical form of the city, not because of it.[2]

Though the older towns and cities of the East retained their tradition of central park spaces, towns laid out in the Midwest and throughout the Great Plains were predominately grid plans of uniform blocks. Some of them, judging from Reps's *Cities of the American West*, provided for one or two "public squares" or "public grounds," yet few of these were centrally located and it is hard to find any of them associated with a public building. In many cases the larger spaces set aside for parks were soon subdivided into building lots. No doubt the reluctance to plan for public spaces in the potentially valuable downtown can be ascribed to the proprietor's eagerness to make money in dowtown real estate. But by cutting straight through the average small American town and establishing its station and freightyards near main street, the railroad transformed the traditional center in ways that the railroad in Europe was never allowed to do: There the station was exiled to the outskirts. Thus the American town very early in the game developed a substitute social center (for men only) around the station and freightyards—a combination skidrow, wholesale district, and horse transportation complex that seems to have offered a variety of illicit and lower class attractions, as well as being a center for news. But this was a poor substitute for the traditional urban space where citizens could forgather and talk, a place described by the

[2] Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Private City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 55.

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anthropologist R. Baumann "as special, isolated from others and enjoyed for its own sake, because talking there may be enjoyed for its own sake and not as part of another activity or for some special instrumental purpose." And so strong was the urge to have such places easily accessible yet detached from the workaday world that the American urban public, or a fraction of it, soon discovered a new and agreeable space on the outskirts of town—a favorite spot for relaxation and sociability. That was the cemetery.

The recreational cemetery

The story of the development of the so-called rural cemetery in America is familiar to anyone who knows our urban history. It began in 1831 with the designing of Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a picturesque landscape of wooded hills, winding roads with paths, and rustic compositions of lawn and stream with pleasant views over the Charles, all in the style of the landscaped gardens fashionable in England at that time. This new type of cemetery immediately became a popular goal of excursions from the city. To quote Norman Newton's account, Mt. Auburn "soon became very popular as a quiet place in which to escape the bustle and clangor of the city—for strolling, for solitude, and even for family picnics. Following its success other cemeteries of the same type began to spring up."[3]

These rural cemeteries, usually located within easy reach of the city, attracted thousands of pleasure-seeking visitors, both before the presence of graves and tomb-stones, and after. Downing estimated that more than 50,000 persons visited Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn in the course of nine months in 1848. They came on foot and in carriages. Guidebooks in hand, they admired the monuments and the artistic planting and the views. They wandered along the lanes and paths, and rested on the expanses of lawn, sketched, ate lunch, and even practiced a little shooting. They had discovered a kind of recreation that the city had never offered.

The generally-accepted explanation for the popularity of the rural or picturesque cemetery is that it satisfied the new romantic love of nature. No doubt this had something to do with the enthusiasm, but the existence of widespread nature romanticism among working class Americans—or indeed among working class Europeans—has yet to be established. What evidence we have is largely

[3] Norman Newton, *Design on the Land* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 268.

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literary, and like our contemporary environmentalism, nature romanticism seems to have been essentially a middle-class movement. In the writings of A.J. Downing, one of the most influential exponents of romanticism in architecture and landscape architecture, there are frequent suggestions that a taste for the romantic was peculiar to persons of refinement and wealth. In fact we now know enough about the fashion to recognize that a carefully-designed and well-executed picturesque landscape park called for considerable skill. It was not a "natural" space, it was (in the hands of the artist-designer) a highly structured space, a "painterly" composition whose rules and techniques were inspired by established landscape painters. It was Olmsted who best understood the canons of the picturesque and who applied them on a grandiose scale in Central Park and Prospect Park. To the average urban working-class American, relaxing in a rural cemetery, the appeal of the new landscape was quite different from that of Downing's well-to-do patrons. He was less aware of the subtleties of romantic composition, or even of the possibility of a direct contact with nature, than of the apparent *lack* of structure. The informal landscape offered the delights of spontaneous contact with other people in a setting that in no way prescribed a certain dress code or a certain code of manners. It was a public space of a novel kind: full of surprises, where emotions and pleasures were fresh and easily shared. It was not simply another artificial space; it was an *environment*, a place for new, primarily social, experiences. It represented the rejection of structure, the rejection of classical urbanism with its historical allusions, and the rejection of architectural public space.

As further evidence that nature romanticism had little or nothing to do with the acceptance of the rural cemetery, we might consider another, less familiar example of the popular American preference for unstructured public places: the camp meetings or revivals, the evangelical gatherings which were numerous in rural and frontier communities through the first half of the nineteenth century. Each of them attracted hundreds of men and women and children, black as well as white, and each lasted several nights and days. Almost always they had a forest background. Yet despite the wilderness setting and the prevailing emotionalism, it would be hard to find any trace of nature awareness in the proceedings, nor in their religious experiences. On the contrary: The forest seemed to free men and women from *any* environmental influences. Again, it was the lack of structure, the lack of behavioral design that produced the exhilaration.

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Olmsted's isolated art-works

The park movement did not evolve out of the Great Revival, but out of the rural cemetery. It was a remarkable instance of how quickly and effectively Americans can respond to a humanitarian need—in this case the need for agreeable, healthy, and beautiful places where the urban population could enjoy itself and (of course) have contact with nature. In 1851 the New York legislature authorized the city to acquire some 840 acres for a public park. Seven years later Frederick Law Olmsted had won the design competition and work had begun on Central Park.

Ten years after that, despite the intervening war, there was not a major American city without a rural park, or the prospect of one, and many of those parks had been designed by Olmsted and his associates. Though at the beginning there were expressions of disapproval—*the park would be taken over by rowdies, it was too* large, it lacked the more formal qualities of the European royal parks—it was not long before parks in general were accepted as invaluable from the point of view of health, of innocent recreation, and as antidotes for the crowded and filthy city slums. Innumerable rural parks were created in smaller towns, and in the new towns of the West. It would be impossible to identify the number of college campuses, courthouses and institutional landscape designs, to say nothing of the landscaped cemeteries, that helped beautify communities throughout the country. Few of these spaces were designed by professionals. Most were the work of local amateur gardeners, and the transformation of many New England commons into neat little parks was frequently done by local women's organizations. For the most part these smaller, unpublicized parks were of no great artistic worth. They had their small lakes, their bandstands, their pretzel paths, and a monotony of elms or cottonwoods, but it must be said that they kept alive the civic tradition of public spaces at a time when the great Olmsted parks were fighting it. In those provincial parks political orators addressed the voters, band concerts were given, ethnic pageants were organized, and patriotic flowerbeds were admired. In the 1890s Frank Waugh, the landscape architect, described the typical western park as containing "race tracks, baseball grounds, camp meeting stands, carp ponds, fountains or fences."

It was this indiscriminate mixture of uses that horrified the readers of *Garden and Forest*, the organ of the Olmsted school of landscape design. For by the end of the century there had developed a very self-assured set of standards for the design of rural parks, and

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the most fundamental rule was that the "primary purpose of a rural park within reach of a great city is to furnish that rest and refreshment of mind and body which come from the tranquilizing influence of contact with natural scenery." This implied two restrictions: First, no building of any kind was to be erected in the park, nor (in the words of Olmsted's son John) "formal gardens, statuary, conservatories, botanical or zoological gardens, concert groves, electric fountains or the like; also popular athletic grounds, parade grounds, ball grounds for boys and facilities for boating and bathing." These installations were not themselves objectionable, and could well have been harmonized with "contact with nature." But the park was *not* nature, or a "natural environment." It was *scenery*, a whole landscape where the visitor could wander for hours over meadows and through woods and next to lakes and streams. For such was Olmsted's ideal: The park as a three-dimensional work of art. This in turn meant that the park should be visibly isolated from the surrounding city, enclosed by an impenetrable wall of greenery, so that the outside urban world would never impinge on the "rural" landscape, or on the experience of those visitors seeking rest and "refreshment of mind and body."

Oxygen and virtue

On aesthetic as well as on demographic grounds, there were reasons for this uncompromising isolation. But remoteness also promoted what Downing, Olmsted, and others had always considered the true role of the rural park: the physical and moral regeneration of the individual visitor. From the very beginning of the park movement there had been frequent references to the elevating influence that the rural park would have. "No one who has closely observed the conduct of the people who visit the park," Olmsted wrote, "can doubt it exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city —an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control and temperance." To supplement this influence, Olmsted created a special park police force to control misconduct, including walking on the grass. But he also relied on the force of example to give the poor "an education to refinement and taste and the mental and moral capital of gentlemen." This was to come from observing and emulating the manners and behavior of upper-class visitors to the park. As Thomas Bender notes, "Olmsted's generation saw no difficulty in recommending that Central Park, their symbol of the democratic com-

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munity, be surrounded by elegant private villas that would exert an elevating influence upon the masses who visited the park."[4]

The early vision of the rural park and its function survived intact for no more than fifty years. One of its original objectives had been the improvement of the health of city dwellers. But medical science soon proved that this was not simply a matter of fresh air and contact with nature; it was a matter of training, and the park was the appropriate place for such training. "Foul air prompts vice," said a New York physician, "and oxygen to virtue as surely as the sunlight paints the flowers of our garden. . . . The varied opportunities of a park would educate [the slum child] and his family in the enjoyment of open-air pleasures. Deprived of these, he and his are educated into the ways of disease and vice by the character of their surroundings."

In the 1880s the well-organized playground movement, which had started by providing small playgrounds in the slums, demanded access to the park, and at much the same time a public eager for places to play various outdoor games brought pressure on the city to provide appropriate space. "It was easier to persuade the city fathers to make use of existing parks than to purchase additional land for recreation. . . . In some cases the introduction of recreational facilities was achieved with intelligence and in conformity with the original park design. In other instances the results were detrimental to the former park purpose."[5]

At the time of Olmsted's death in 1903 the park had largely ceased to be an environment in which the individual could enjoy solitary contact with nature, and had become an environment dedicated to guidance in recreation, health, citizenship, and nature knowledge. It was often crowded with cultural and recreational facilities, group activities, and increasingly populated by professional recreationists, playground supervisors, and leadership counselors. Even the definition of the park underwent drastic revision: It is now described in official documents as an open space, containing public facilities and with the appearance of a natural landscape. It is merely one element in a nation-wide ecosystem.

The landscape of diversity

In retrospect, how unpredictable and how extraordinary was the

[4] Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), p. 179.
[5] George Butler, "Change in the City Parks," *Landscape* 8 (Winter 1958-59).

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change over a period of less than a century in the American concept of public spaces! The neo-classical square, in part surrounded by public buildings, and located in the heart of the city, had been the symbol of political status, recognized by all. In the 1860s, however, the rural park began to replace it in the public perception, and the rural park not only rejected any contact with architecture and formal urbanism, but was located as far as possible from workaday activities, as if to say: Here is the true center, the place where nature establishes the laws.

But perhaps the most dramatic contrast between the two public spaces was in their respective definitions of community. The neoclassical square implied a body of people, politically and socially homogeneous, inhabiting a well-defined political territory with clear-cut class divisions. The visitors to the rural park came singly, each in pursuit of an individual contact with nature, a private experience. The ideal romantic community was the garden suburb, where reverence for the environment was the only common bond, and anything like an urban or political center was discouraged. Where can such a center be seen in Olmsted's design for Riverside, the Chicago suburb? It is a pleasant tangle of curving roads and lanes where all residences are isolated by greenery. Community did not mean homogeneity or uniformity, it meant diversity, and nothing was more gratifying to Olmsted than to see a diverse public in Central Park. Again and again he described "the persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile." But this was a diversity of *individuals*. When the various recreational activities invaded the park in the 1880s, what ensued was a diversity of *groups*: age groups, ethnic groups, sports groups, neighborhood groups. That was quite another kind of diversity, and the spaces occupied by these groups, if only temporarily, constituted so many public places in the strictest sense: places where like-minded people came together to share an identity.

The emergence of these hitherto non-existent groups was probably the greatest contribution of the rural park. Long after the old-fashioned solitary pursuit of the contact with nature had vanished from the scene, these miniature societies with special identities continued to flourish and to acquire increasing public recognition over the years. Eventually they expanded beyond the park, and I think it was the automobile that encouraged this dispersal.

Though it is common practice to blame the automobile for having destroyed many territorial communities—particularly rural ones —the car has made it possible for us to come together over great

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distances and in a shorter length of time than ever before, and this in turn has made possible the creation of many new and different public spaces throughout the landscape. Without the automobile countless recreational areas, monuments, national parks, to say nothing of remoter sections of our cities, would never have become part of those experiences which Americans always pursue. Quite aside from what they teach us, they serve as way-stations, as it were, in our American, essentially Protestant, pilgrimage of self-perfection through endless education.

We do well to encourage the creation of all such spaces combining recreation with knowledge of nature and of our past. Their popularity is their best reason for existing. Yet many of us are aware that another, no less important public space, the one where we seek out and enjoy the company and stimulation of others, has been much neglected. We have outgrown the classical monumental square with its political overtones. We now seldom congregate as citizens, and when we do, it is more to protest than to celebrate our collective identity. We have learned from experience that such oversize public spaces—and I would certainly include the Olmsted style park with its oversize natural landscapes—eventually can be subverted by the authorities and used to indoctrinate us with some establishment philosophy: the Wonders of Nature, the Wonders of Art, the Wonders of Physical Fitness, or the supreme Wonders of the Commissars looking down at us from their podium. Small, more intimate, less structured spaces are what we now prefer. "This loss of the natural impulse to monumentality," John Summerson observed, "should not be a matter of regret. It is a perfectly natural reflection of the change which is taking place in the whole character of western culture. All those things which suggested and supported monumentality are in dissolution. The corporate or social importance of religion was one of them. The sense of the dominance of a class—of the exclusive possession of certain privileges by certain groups—was another." [6]

To these things supporting monumentality in the past must be added the concept of a monolithic Public, the concept of a homogeneous People. For the public now is a composition of constantly shifting, overlapping groups—ethnic groups, social groups, age groups, special interest groups—and each of them, at one time or another, needs its own space, distinct from the surrounding urban fabric, where its own special social forms, its own special lan-

[6] John N. Summerson, *Heavenly Mansions* (New York: Norton Library, 1963).

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guage and set of relations, can flourish, a space which confers a brief visibility on the group. We have too few of these spaces today, too few resembling the Prado in the North End of Boston, or the ad hoc open air social spaces which often evolve in urban ethnic or racial neighborhoods and do so much to maintain a sense of local identity and custom. With great taste and infinite goodwill, landscape architects have designed many mini-parks to relieve the monotony of our towns and cities. But the Olmsted tradition persists, and what we all too often have are overelaborate spaces with the inevitable display of vegetation, the inevitable ingenious fountain, and the inevitable emphasis on individual isolation. Yet contact with other people, not contact with nature, is what most of us are really after.

A return to the street

Despite our current admiration for the formal square as a feature of the urban scene, despite our attempts to introduce it in our residential areas and shopping centers and in urban renewal projects, the time is approaching, I suspect, when we will turn our attention elsewhere. There are in fact many signs that the street, or a given fragment of the street, will be the true public space of the future.

If in fact this is the case, we will be reverting, unconsciously of course, to a medieval urban concept which long preceded the Renaissance concept of the public square. In the Middle Ages it was the street—tortuous, dirty, crowded—and not the public space identified with the church or castle or market, that was the center of economic and social life. The street was the place of work, the place of buying and selling, the place of meeting and negotiating, and the scene of the important religious and civic ceremonies and processions.

But its most significant trait was its blending of domestic and public life, its interplay of two distinct kinds of space. The narrow, overcrowded buildings bordering it spilled over into the street and transformed it into a place of workshops, kitchens, and merchandising, into a place of leisure and sociability, and confrontation of every kind. It was this confusion of functions, the confusion of two different realms of law and custom, that made the medieval street a kind of city within a city, and the scene of innovations in policing, maintenance, and social reform. Until the eighteenth century the street was actually something far more extensive than the travelled space between the houses. It was the matrix of a community, al-

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ways alive to threats of intrusion, jealous of privileges and customs, and conscious of its own unique character.

For many economic, social, and aesthetic reasons, we are now beginning to think of the street and its relation to its inhabitants in a way that recalls the medieval concept. Robert Gutman wrote:

> The revival of interest in the urban street has been accompanied by a wholly new emphasis in the view of the street's primary social function. Put simply, what sets the contemporary idea apart from previous definitions is the conviction that the street should be designed and managed for the benefit of its residents. . . . These impulses to make the street work, to make it into a community, some of which are specific to the situation of the city today, have gained strength because . . . the residents of urban streets until recently regarded themselves as a relatively homogeneous population. This important point is often overlooked. We are concerned about the street community in large part because for the very first time in the history of cities the simple virtues and joys of urban life have been diminished for all social groups; and we connect this reduction in our level of satisfaction and safety with the breakdown of the community.[7]

Not every street can be defined as an essential spatial element in a community. The majority will continue to be public utilities. But insofar as certain streets will be seen as public places, as being closely related to their immediate built environment, they will be playing the social role we have long associated with the traditional public square: the place where we exhibit our permanent identity as members of the community. The learning experience, the experience of contact with new sensations, new people, new ideas belongs elsewhere. The street as the public space of a community, modest in size, simple in structure, will serve a strictly traditional purpose. It will be where, in the words of Paul Weiss, we recognize and abide by "a mosaic of accepted customs, conventions, habitual ways of evaluating, responding, and acting . . . . men must, to be perfected, become social beings. They must act to make the structure of the group an integral part of themselves and a desirable link with others."

[7] Robert Gutman, "The Street Generation," in *On Streets*, Stanford Anderson, ed. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1978).

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The motive behind Olmsted's park

ROGER STARR

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED is one of those historical figures who seems less familiar the more one reads about him. At first we take him for granted as the designer of his parks, those great masterpieces of public art. Then, as we learn more about him, we wonder what prepared him to build them, and how he conceived their purpose in relation to his own experiences and training, and more especially to the cities into which they were placed.

A discontinuous career

Most of Olmsted's work as a park builder came after the 1860s, by which time landscape architecture had already become something of a profession. Yet nothing in the life of this great urban park builder suggests adequate preparation for such undertakings. M.M. Graff, one of the shrewder of his present-day admirers, managed to sustain in the midst of her admiration a sharp sense of his professional deficiencies. "Horticulture," she wrote in a pamphlet about Central Park, "is a profession in which no unqualified person ever hesitates to meddle. Olmsted was no exception. Cen-

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tral Park still suffers from the effects of his ignorance of the nature and habits of plant material." [1]

If Olmsted was not a gardener or landscape architect—though that is how he later described himself in submitting park proposals to cities other than New York—neither was he an engineer. Nevertheless, the engineering achievements of Central Park (and even more impressively, of Boston parks) were substantial. They included an effective drainage plan for the southern end of the park, which had formerly been swampy and useless for pedestrian traverse; the depressing of the four roads that the Central Park Commission was required to cut across the park in order to join the east and west sides of Manhattan; and the successful separation of the different kinds of intra-park traffic—pedestrian, vehicular, and equestrian—so they could see each other without interfering with each other. And, not least, there was the management of rock and removed fill: The scooped-out material from some changes in natural configuration was used to elevate the terrain at others.

What Olmsted demonstrated was not the engineering skills and discipline required to design all of the above, but judgment in selecting the most promising designs of others (and the ability to direct, manage, co-ordinate, and protect their work even when the political pressure of the Central Park Commission became unreasonable or niggling). And if he was neither a landscape architect nor an engineer, likewise he was no designer of buildings. (Many of his admirers insist on considering him one, perhaps because of the way in which he managed to keep people in his shadow—for example, Calvert Vaux, his extremely talented junior partner who actually designed the buildings, and Jacob Maul, who conceived and executed their fascinating details.)

Olmsted came to Central Park, and through Central Park to his preeminence as a park builder, almost by accident. Although the final plans had not yet been selected, work on Central Park had begun, and the superintendent's position was vacant. At the suggestion of a friend, Olmsted applied, even though by today's standards he was woefully underqualified. His only real credential was as a writer on parks, and this itself was limited to passages he had written in travel books about Europe. As to his other qualifications, he had twice tried and failed as a "scientific farmer," once in New England, once on Staten Island. His career as a publisher ended in bankruptcy. And his travel books on the American South were

[1] M.M. Graff, *The Men Who Made Central Park* (New York: Greensward Foundation, 1982), p. 35.

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a disappointment to his editor, Henry Raymond. (By this time, Olmsted had concluded that slavery was irreconcilable with the future of America, harmful both to slave and master, and was turning his attention more directly to the conditions necessary to produce a just, democratic society.)

But he was appointed, and from this position he submitted, along with Calvert Vaux, the famous "Greensward Plan" for the completion of the park. This was the winning plan of the design contest (though it would later cause a certain amount of friction between Olmsted and Egbert Viele, the park engineer, whose own plan had been passed over).

Olmsted never really finished the work in Central Park; he left, exhausted by his constant battles with the Commission, and in particular with Andrew Green, its chief financial officer and a fiscal niggler who allowed neither political allegiance, personal sympathy, nor a sense of the park's ultimate importance to support any expense for which he could not find a bookkeeping justification. Olmsted's next assignment was as radical a break with his past as the park superintendency had been: He directed the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a sort of battlefield Red Cross, during the first two years of the Civil War. He left abruptly, on the edge of a nervous breakdown, and moved to California, where he ran a mine (without notable financial success).

The motives of a moralist

This chronicle of discontinuous careers, failures, or, at best, partial successes stands in sharp contrast to the achievements of Frederick Olmsted as the modern world perceives them. But there is no doubt that he left a uniquely impressive mark on American cities. He was not simply an executive (the terms "administrator" and "expert in public administration" come to mind, but simply do not fit), and neither was he merely a designer who was trying to promote an aesthetic vision. What distinguished Olmsted's work was the motive behind it: It expressed his determination to bring a constructive and fruitful order to human life among the lower classes in emerging industrial cities of the second half of the nineteenth century. Central Park was not only intended as a source of joy and relaxation for the middle and upper classes, to whom it offered a rural experience within the city; it was also to be an instrument, perhaps the crucial instrument, in the imposition of moral order on the city's disorganized poor. It expressed not merely a topographi-

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cal or an architectural or horticultural vision, but a vision of the constituent institutions of a good society.

In 1882, Olmsted wrote a pamphlet describing his ordeals in Central Park, calling it "The Spoils of the Park," and labeling himself in its subtitle as a "wholly unpractical man." The description is both half-right and completely wrong. Though he strove mightily to be a social philosopher, he could not restrain himself from practical activities; though he immersed himself in practical work, he could not convey to the political people for whom he worked the moral and political significance of what he was doing. Starting his park work at a time when the injustice of chattel slavery seemed reflected in the injustice of wage slavery and the conditions of life in the industrial city, Olmsted was likely to describe his object as an effort to make the vision of democracy real. The "new birth of freedom," which Lincoln spoke of in 1863, was by itself an empty abstraction for Olmsted, without the means to inspire moral order. He saw the solution to social problems in public works, not private words.

Most of those who actually frequented Central Park were thrilled by its appearance, and assumed that what animated Olmsted was the tension between a garden-like arrangement of nature and a cunning representation of nature in the wild. Certainly this was the goal of his collaborators—Vaux, Maul, and Ignaz Pilat—whom Mrs. Graff credits with saving Olmsted from the full consequences of his uninformed horticultural enthusiasms. But Olmsted was not preoccupied with aesthetics in 1857, but rather with the fear common in reformist and religious circles (and sharpened by the Draft Riots of 1863) that the emerging city would inflict disorder on its residents, infect them with contagious diseases, separate them from the institutions that inspire order (such as churches and guilds), and leave them without the means or the inspiration to overcome the consequent social disorganization.

It was Olmsted's strange mixture of motives that enabled him to accept technological improvements as both a cause of and a remedy for the growing social confusion of the time. High skill would make the very existence of the park possible, given its unpromising surroundings; and an understanding of social needs would shape its land use so that it could perform its rehabilitative *and* aesthetic functions. High technology, he recognized, particularly in sanitary engineering and water supply improvements, was already increasing life expectancy. And this technology would necessarily arise in the city, not in rural surroundings. For that reason

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the city was, at least potentially, the nursery of the social improvements required in the face of the breakdown of the strong family influences and local, parochial institutions one associates with rural and village life. But to be that nursery, the city would have to be reshaped.

Improving the health of the new urban masses

The first necessity was to reduce the human density of the most crowded cities. In his and Vaux's proposals for what is now Prospect Park, Olmsted pointed out to the Brooklyn officials that in London, with an average population density of 50,000 people per square mile in 1860, life expectancy was 26 years, while in Liverpool, with its much greater population density of 140,000 per square mile, life expectancy was only 17 years. It is obvious today that high densities produce social problems, as well as the higher morbidity that results from contagious infections. The building of a park tends, if anything, to raise the density of the population in the rest of the city, but as Olmsted pointed out to the Brooklyn officials, it also reduces the threats to both physical and social health.

He wrote at length of the problems caused by density: the lack of sunlight, for example, that is imposed on narrow streets by lining them with six story buildings. In the park, the resident of such a neighborhood would have a chance, for part of the day or week, to enjoy the benefits of the sun of which he was otherwise deprived. The park also would, in Olmsted's words, counter the morbid effects of a certain gas (not identified precisely but clearly meant to be carbon dioxide) produced by concentrated human respiration. It is certainly true that trees absorb carbon dioxide and nitrogen and exhale oxygen, but the effect of a park in purifying the air must be greatly attenuated, especially if the noxious gases are produced by other human polluters.

More important is the possibility of improving the physical health of the city dwellers through the physical exercise connected with parks. Obviously Olmsted planned for certain types of exercise in Central Park, but it must be remembered that at the time he and Vaux prepared the Greensward Plan, competitive athletics, so familiar today, were practically unknown. Women were not expected to engage in them (and were dressed so as to make serious exercise impossible). Men's competitive games like hockey, football, tennis, and basketball had not even been invented. And for both

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sexes, the need for physical exercise was less than what it has become since the development of machines that lighten the burden of physical work and self-propelled locomotion. One of the interesting features of the Olmsted parks, however, is that they have proved themselves quite adaptable to the demand for space for vigorous exercise. (The spaces that have since been reserved for competitive athletics had originally been intended for military training and parading.) Some Olmsted purists resent the intrusion of physical and competitive exercises on a large scale in the parks, because these exercises reduced the area available for less violent movement, and seem to them inconsistent with the spirit of Olmsted's day. But that reaction is based on a misunderstanding of what Olmsted really expected the parks to accomplish.

"Speechlessness" and moral regeneration

In an early report on Prospect Park, it is clear that he expected the park to produce a moral change in those who would frequent it. He claims that the "addition of health, strength, and morality" that comes from a park is both good in an absolute sense and good materially, since it improves the economic productivity of the city's economy by regenerating human energy following the draining daily toil.

The park, he writes, by "diverting the imagination," presents new stimulants to the senses that are both agreeable in themselves and a welcome relief from the urban objects people encounter day in, day out. The park, he says, must provide scenery that contrasts as vividly as possible with what is to be seen in the rest of the town. Further, the park must provide an opportunity for "people to come together for the single purpose of enjoyment unembarrassed by the limitations with which they are surrounded at home, or in the pursuit of their daily avocations, or of such amusements as are elsewhere offered."

As to the first of these two requirements, Olmsted is apparently contrasting nature and man. The contrast, in this case, seems to fall far short of the romantic naturalist view that "only man is vile." Yet, without Olmsted actually saying so, it is clear that he saw the urban man of his time as in an imperfect state, one in which material values counted for too much, spiritual values for too little. Nature does not provide the outline of a better moral order, but simply a small slice of order itself. At this juncture, Olmsted parts company with the more formally-trained horticulturists. They

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claim, as we gather from Mrs. Graff's remarks, that natural order is betrayed or parodied by a park designer who insists on cluttering the park landscape with exotic plants that could not naturally grow there. In Central Park, for example, Olmsted planted trees that he had admired in Europe or even in Panama. To the unschooled observer, their incongruity is not noticeable. To the trained horticulturist, however, the result is not orderly but fanciful, just as Calvert Vaux's Belvedere Castle, in the middle of the park—which conjoins Gothic, Moorish, Romanesque, and Norman elements in a structure that is as seductive as a toy store, but as disorderly as a dream—seemed fanciful to trained architects.

Probably, though, Olmsted wanted the rural elements not to emphasize the natural orderliness of the non-human world, but for another purpose altogether. Like many other Americans who were worrying about the practical problem of keeping young people in the city from a life of vice and destruction, Olmsted wanted the rural contrast of the park to suggest that nature was more moral, or less immoral, than man, particularly urban man. It was a widespread belief in the nineteenth century that sending slum children to the country would improve their souls (as we can learn in Professor Paul Boyer's pioneering book, *Urban Masses and American Moral Order*), and this view remains credible to many people today. The faith in the moral regenerative capacity of farms and parks was partly based on the realistic observation that a critical mass of children would not be assembled there, so mob psychology would not overcome individual conscience.

Another part of the faith in rural surroundings was surely rooted in the notion that nature is benign, a misconception that continues to afflict some sentimentalists. Most people now know better. They recognize that the non-human world is a battleground for survival, and that if it can be said to set forth any example of morality, it does so only by providing an escape from those human vices connected with speech: hypocrisy, lying, group hatred, envy. It is a long list. What the park offers is a relief from the constant buzz of the city, and the stony messages implicit in its buildings. The park offers speechlessness.

Olmsted expressed this view tangentially in a letter to the commissioners in January 1859. Under the heading "Motive of the Park," he writes:

> [The park] should present an aspect of spaciousness and tranquility with variety and intricacy of arrangement, thereby affording the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle, and monotonous street-

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> division of the city. . . . At present, in the lower Park especially, except in those places where the work of improvement is already well advanced, its aspect is one of mere undignified ruggedness. But this is due almost entirely to the absence of soil and foliage. When these are supplied, as they will be in a few years, that peculiar picturesqueness of effect, which can only be obtained in a high degree where rocky masses exist as a basis of operations, will become strikingly obvious. Grass and shrubbery can be formed anywhere, but great rocks, and those salient forms of earth-surface which are only found in nature where rock exists, can never be imitated on a large scale with perfect success. Although, therefore, it will require a heavy expenditure to make the Park complete, the final artistic effect will be much finer than could possibly be obtained upon a tract of the richest and most easily worked soil, the natural outlines of which were tame and prosaic.

The word "tranquility" suggests not merely silence but peace, the absence of contention. He was trying to tell the commissioners not to stint on the engineering costs of the park if they expected it to fulfill the functions so necessary to an orderly city: to make the restless multitudes confront the silence and permanence of rock, and perhaps modify their restless misbehavior as a result. It is perhaps fanciful, but irresistible, to suggest that Olmsted was trying to achieve in the park the three-dimensional essence of Sunday London that Wordsworth captured from Westminister Bridge. The park designer, like the poet, saw in the silent speechlessness of stone and buildings a moral orderliness that the weekday city outside the park could not provide. The park would bring about the same kind of urban structure that so impressed Wordsworth only when "the very houses seemed asleep and all that mighty heart was lying still."

An egalitarian elitist?

And yet that was only part of the reason behind the park. Olmsted probably saw even greater promise in the prospective commingling of social classes, which could be promoted by the proper design of the park, just as he dreamed of a democracy in which all would share the ideals of a genuine aristocracy. Olmsted might be called an egalitarian elitist. Like many Americans who did not attend Yale or Harvard, or did not spring from the Adams family tree, he probably overvalued the uplifting effect of hearing college lectures or breaking bread with descendants of the first families. As a practical man, he was also quite well aware of the fact that new arrivals in a still nascent society do not draw an understand-

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ing of its mores from the air. It is the elites who have the responsibility for transmitting those mores through the city's informal educators: teachers, policemen, tradesmen, clergy. He imagined that the required mores would be transmitted in a park setting to those who most needed the instruction.

Olmsted expresses his hope for accomplishing this commingling-by-design in the same report to the commission. One of the features of his Greensward Plan was the special adaptation he made of the "Parade Ground" that was required under the terms of the Commission's mandate. Greensward added some space to the Parade Ground, and Olmsted illuminated his and Vaux's intentions in these words: "Ordinarily it [the Parade Ground] will be like a great country green or open common, a place where children may run about and play until they are tired, in nobody's way, and without danger of being run over or injured if they fall."

The rather sly replacement of the mandated Parade Ground by an "Open Common" is simply further evidence for a view of Olmsted's purposes that was put forth with clarity by Charles Beveridge and David Schuyler in their notes to the third volume of Olmsted's papers.[2] They quote from letters written by him to James T. Fields, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and Henry Bellows, who wrote for that magazine. While some newspapers, notably the *New York Herald*, were mocking the notion that different social classes could enjoy the same park at the same time, Olmsted wrote Fields: "I think it is good time, too, for showing how strongly experience in the park argues against certain political and social fallacies [i.e., the impossibility of social commingling] commonly entertained & how far it thus far justifies the highest hopes which have been entertained of its moral influence."

Olmsted was strengthened in his conviction by a letter from the Mayor of Birmingham, England, about that city's Aston Park. Mayor Thomas Lloyd wrote:

> . . . I have great pleasure in stating that I consider [Aston Park] to have afforded decided evidence of the uselessness of corrective measures in any matter where the amusements of the people are concerned. We have had, as you are aware, nearly 300,000 people in the past half year, and they have walked about, played games, and on several occasions danced by daylight and have taken refreshment, including beer and spirits (if asked for) without restriction, and there

[2] Charles E. Beveridge and David Schuyler, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmstead*, volume 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 273, footnote 14.

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has been only occasion for the interference of the Police (and it is not very often that we have them at the Park) on two occasions of very trifling importance.

Olmsted's letter to Fields resulted in an article by Bellows, who, after visiting the unfinished park, was quite swept away by the social vision that "engraft[ed] the energy, foresight, and liberality of concentrated power on democratic ideas, and [kept] all that adorned and improved the past while abandoning what has impaired and disgraced it."

A mixed success

In fact, as everybody must know, Central Park was immensely successful, but not really in the way, and for all the reasons, that Olmsted imagined. In the first years after its construction, it was so far away from the sections of the city occupied by those who most needed its uplifting influence that it remained rather a playground for the city's original aristocracy. That clientele changed over the years, but only because the city kept producing new elites, new aristocracies, who came to live in row houses on the side streets to the east and west of the park. It is true that as the elevated trains were built on Columbus and Third and Second Avenues, tenement houses for low income families followed. Some of their children did use the park, but many preferred to play on the streets; and those who did come to the park were not generally motivated to absorb morality from the children of the rich. They were more likely to take footballs from them.

Later, as the cost of domestic help rose and transportation to the suburbs improved, many of the families who had originally occupied the row houses nearest the park moved from the city. Their former one-family homes became rooming houses for the very poor. The northern edge of the park became Spanish Harlem, and then, as the Hispanics moved to the east, their place was taken in part by American blacks. Vandalism became a more serious problem than before; some of the handsomest small structures in the park were destroyed, and in the areas that were still safe, crowds were attracted by a band shell and a skating rink with artificial ice. In neither case did the architecture harmonize with what Vaux and Olmsted had originally designed.

Now, a new, non-white middle class is beginning to emerge, and the safer central sections of the park are providing these people with many recreational opportunities. As the architectural preserva-

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tion movement attracts more patrons and adherents, restoration work on the buildings, notably the Belvedere, has made magnificent progress. But it seems unlikely that the park has been able to do much to establish moral order among the urban masses. Its service to the old and new elites has been invaluable; it has provided other, less affluent people with invaluable open space, where baseball, soccer, and touch football are played (even to the dismay of some who believe they understand the purity of Olmsted's intentions). The problem of the urban masses and moral order is probably as serious today in New York as it was in the last century. And while it is regrettable that the park did not make good on one of Olmsted's main reasons for its construction, there certainly remains much to rejoice in.

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Public buildings: symbols qualified by experience

DONLYN LYNDON

THE notebook on which I write this, purchased in the supermarket of a small town in Michigan, has a picture on the cover that perhaps illustrates our condition. The rendering is gruesome to my untutored eye: a murky brown, cellar-like space inhabited by three figures, mutants of some grotesque sort that appear to be engaged in a musical performance. One is bright blue and vaguely elephantine, the other two are of sickly yellow and brown hues, malformed on the top but each distinctly two-legged and upright, both with giant-toed feet planted firmly and flatly on the ground. There are four distinctly recognizable items in the picture: a masonry arch in the background, two microphones that receive the attentions of the two upright figures, and a pair of spotlights at the feet of the central celebrity figure. Three almost recognizable items appear: something very like a clarinet that one figure holds to an indistinct portion of its upper anatomy, an electrical junction box, and a metallic relief panel that bears the features of a man's face, two hands, and the mid-parts of a belted torso. A bright red line traces a frame around the picture and emblazons the headline "Return of the Jedi" across the top.

I say "perhaps" this illustrates our condition because I have never

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seen a Star Wars film, so the popular meanings of these figures escape me entirely, just as the nuances of architecture escape many. The plight I have in mind, however, is our participation in a culture wherein the morbid fascination of a mutant world can be counted on to elicit shared recognition from millions of consumers (in this case purchasers of rather low-grade notepaper), while there is virtually no agreement regarding the nature of a shared public place or how we should use our resources to build an environment that has benefits for the public. If we would believe my notebook cover, the shared constants in our world today are electronics (microphone and switches), celebrity status (spotlights), music, and the sheltering arch. Music gives hope, and to an architect the arch, at least, is reassuring.

Architecture between past and future

Once upon a time architecture was the big production; architects (or craftsmen much like them) transformed ordinary buildings into magical monuments, places that formed the consciousness of generations, buildings that, through a tremendous investment of skill and labor, commanded the imagination of a people. Nothing in recent memory has had this effect, with the possible exception of Mr. Blanding's Dream House—and there the imaginative skills were invested in words and film, not bricks, mortar, or even clapboards. Architecture is hard put to compete for public loyalty with the distributive capacity of the media.

Still, great places persist, and our passion for visiting them has become the basis for an international industry. Borobudur, the Arc de Triomphe, Taj Mahal, Big Ben—these have become the trademarks of TWA. Yet the experience of place, we are told by critics, has become yet another packaged consumer item, with tightly-controlled tourist expectations. TWA can exploit great monuments from the past because we yearn, now more than ever, to be part of something more than our immediate present. And we have been taught to believe that we can have it cheaply, complete with "frequent flyer" bonuses.

Real places have a power over the mind because they are the locus of our actions; the events of our lives are connected with the settings in which they take place. Places take on meanings through our participation in them. Private places develop an intimacy of association that nurtures individual identity; public places must of necessity bring together elements that reflect or can sup-

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port common bonds. The paths to commonality are by no means straight and narrow. Places matter to us because we come to care about them; we have a telling experience there—a smile from a friend, a lesson from a parent, a dance with a stranger—and the place becomes imbued with association. Or we recognize the investments that others have made in the place and admire their efforts—examine the craftsmanship of masonry set in place centuries ago, study the proportions of a carefully-determined facade, delight in the festoons of a festival that mark the presence of traditional public ceremony, connect ourselves with the past by taking part in a procession that takes its very form from the shape of a historical place.

J.B. Jackson, in his provocative essay "The Necessity for Ruins," characterized the traditional civic monument as the measure of our obligation to the past and commitment to the future—of a society's intention to live up to the standards and ideals of a significant event or great person. We seem now to have an entirely different conception of the national indebtedness—we pass on to our children the obligations that we are unwilling to meet ourselves. Unmanageable radioactive waste is but the most arrogant of our legacies, a telling symbol of our careless disregard for the future.

What does all this have to do with the architecture of public buildings? How might it influence the designs, the decision to build, or the appreciation of public places? There are three propositions I would submit for consideration:

1. All buildings should be seen as opportunities to build the city—as fragments of a covenant with the future.
2. It is necessary to beware of the exploitive ingenuity of our time; the impulse to make celebrities and the widespread diffusion of photographic images may subvert the search for places that can gather genuine public significance.
3. Public architecture should be given a mandate that exceeds that of private building. That mandate should include considerations of place, of the dignity of persons, and of the connection with a larger, more enduring order than that which characterizes the market.

Consideration of the public interest in building must of course proceed from a position regarding the nature of the public and in what measure it stands in independence from the aggregate of private interests. Architects (myself included) are characteristically befuddled on this issue. Property rights in American cities are

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now hopelessly entangled with issues that bear on the financial management of cities. Our fractured political structure intersects with a complex, interconnected economic structure to make the center city into a Monopoly gameboard. We have no coherent vision of how to build to public benefit because modern government is for most a contingent force, a qualifier, rather than an embodiment of purpose.

Building and bureaucracy

There are several ways in which a building may be considered public. First, it may be privately owned, though open to the public as shops generally are, and therefore constitute a significant segment of what may be considered the public realm. Second, it may be constructed with public funds as a general-use facility such as a parking garage, for instance, or public works in general. Third, it may house a publicly-funded special institution such as a hospital, school, or library. Fourth, it may be a place in which to "be public"—a stadium, meeting hall, or plaza. Fifth, it may be a government building, expected to represent the public interest as well as to house its functionaries.

Buildings of the first sort—such as shops, department stores, theaters, even churches—are public in that they are accessible to the public at large and make up a large part of the spatial realm that is generally used, even though their ownership and control are distinctly private. These, the spaces that are contiguous with the public rights-of-way, are the most ubiquitous definers of the public realm. If they are obscure, devoid of information, "dead on the street," they will structure an environment that is lifeless, one that is not only tiresome, but that conveys a disregard for the lively exchange between people that lies at the base of democratic life.

This day-to-day lively exchange is not generally understood today as a way of knowing, as the arena for understanding our society and recognizing the diversity of initiatives that are the fruits of a secular, free society (though this was suggested by Robert Venturi's haunting phrase, "Main Street is almost all right"). It is also not generally recognized that this environment comes about through a form of public design, by way of street patterns, lot dispositions, zoning regulations, building and sign ordinances, and so on. The regulations and ordinances that implement these designs are usually commonplace, based on dimly-perceived presumptions

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about the nature of the public realm, and seldom examined in terms of their predicted outcome in the form of the city—except insofar as they are generally expected to contribute to a certain tidiness in the relations between buildings and activities.

The bureaucratic mind, dedicated as it is to control and prediction, is not comfortable with the untidy. Places which come under the predominant influence of government and financial institutions tend to become emotionally arid, with little opportunity to find or express personal insight or initiative. Such places instead become the domains of material expression, expensive, hard places where investment is geared more to maintenance than to the proffering of enjoyment or even enlightenment for the many. The center of Austin, Texas, is an excellent though not exceptional case in point. Situated in a beautiful location, with abundant landscaping and rolling land around, the ambitious and dignified capitol grounds are surrounded by a band of government agencies and financial institutions that have denuded the landscape, and forged in its stead a place that is hard and overscaled, strewn with monuments to power and endurance. These buildings have simple messages that, once received, sustain no further scrutiny, yet bear down upon us as we pass, imposing themselves on the daily public life of Austin's citizens.

In contrast to this we might place the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, a Napoleonic vision extended with a real sense of purpose several generations later by Haussmann's bureaucracy. Situated next to the Louvre and the Tuileries gardens, its uniform architectural cadence is juxtaposed for part of its stretch against great buildings recalling great events, then opens to the side of a grand park filled with carefully-measured trees. The tiny little shops that inhabit this magnificent bit of public scenery gain perspective from their confrontation with a larger, more-differentiated area beyond. This was an instance of government architects setting the frame, then leaving private initiative to fill out the internal organization of the shops and residences. The regulated order of the Rue de Rivoli facade mediates between the disorderly initiatives of the marketplace and the regal ambitions for a controlled place of resort. The sharp, built boundary for the two is far more effective than the antiseptic indifference that is generally fostered by state control now, when the architect's magical artifice is suspect, if not absent.

What works in the shade of the Louvre and opposite a grand gravelled park should not too easily be seen as a model transfer-

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able to other parts of the city, let alone to other cultures. Yet it is a clear, readily-imagined example of the use of building form to suit both civic purpose and private interests. And it is a form that was initially imagined with the pleasures of an encompassing scene, albeit not the specific interests of previous landholders, in mind. What matters here is the willingness and authority to design the physical connections between things, rather than leaving their juxtaposition to be softened by intervening space—in the manner that still dominates the American design imagination.

The design of mental and physical connections between the buildings of government and the places of which they are a part has been a long time coming in the United States. Buildings for public use were few in the days of the founding, and often linked with the marketplace. Gradually most public buildings were elaborated into a symbolic formula that was almost immune to local qualification. However, a string of particularized American examples indicates the opportunity to make buildings here that can carry public meanings not only through conventional symbols but also through a complex engagement with everyday life. We can follow the trail of these conceptual changes on the two coasts, first in Boston and then in various spots in California, with a brief stop at Lincoln, Nebraska en route.

Massachusetts: from colony to commonwealth

The earliest town hall in Boston, no longer extant, was associated with the market, like many of the first city halls in Europe. It was perched over an open porch that offered shelter for the exchange of goods in a none-too-favorable climate. This pattern was continued in a refined form in Faneuil Hall, a place of public assembly donated to the town by a wealthy merchant, and in which much of the rhetoric leading to the American Revolution was first sounded. It harbored meat and provisions stores on its ground floor until very recently, when they were replaced by shops selling ice cream and old photographs of Boston. The meeting hall remains, however, a beautiful, light-filled, balconied room now used for special occasions and tourist visits. Conceived initially as a part of the marketplace—because that is where the citizenry gathered—Faneuil Hall now lends its name to a revitalized market area. The markets form a lively public place, though now the shops are more an entertainment than a vital source of either food or income. The real trading takes place elsewhere—in land, options, and interest—

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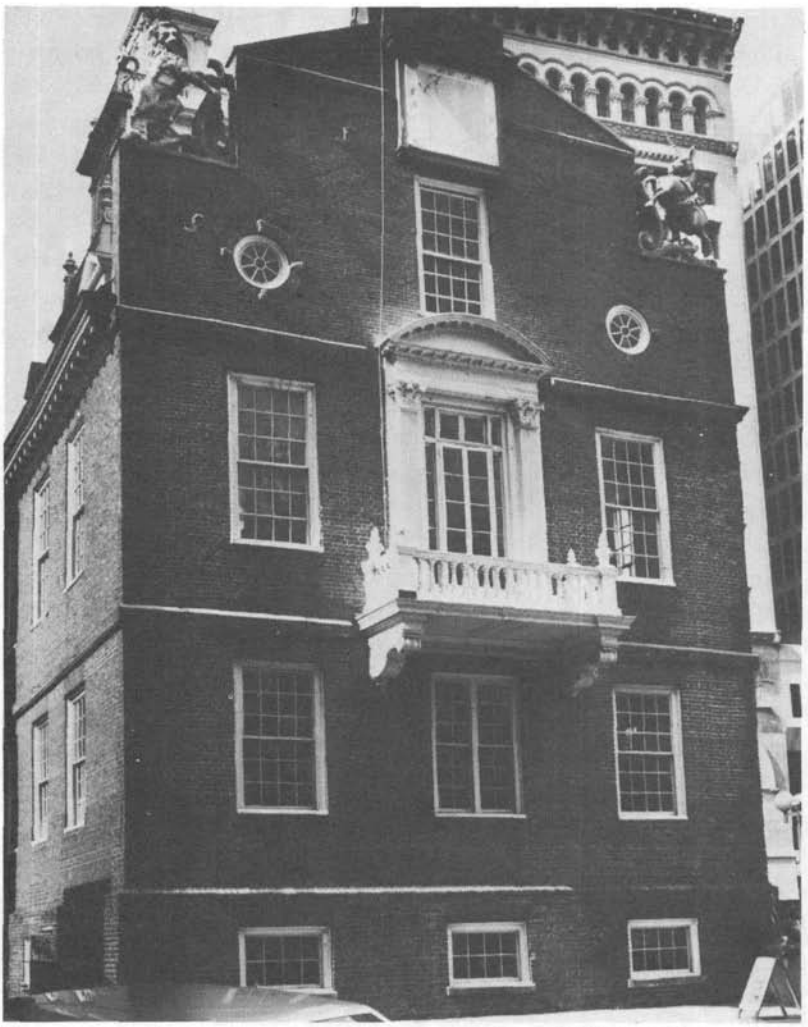

FIGURE I. *Old State House, Boston, Mass. (1712) (Photo: Alice Wingwall)*

and the citizenry is too numerous (or too uninterested) to gather anywhere, except in fun. Here, as in the more affluent shopping centers, the experience of shopping, complete with jugglers, musicians, banners, and flowers, has become street theater of the most engaging sort. Buying our bread has become a circus.

Buildings for the state have followed a different path. The Old State House, built in 1712 as the home of the Colonial government, was constructed on the site of the original town hall (Figure I). It is a simple volume, large for its time (though dwarfed now), and made gracious by embellishments. An elegantly formed lantern

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towers several stories above its center, proudly announcing its landmark status. This status is conferred not only by civic purpose but by its location at the most important crossing in Boston. One end of the building faces down State Street, out Long Wharf to the sea and to England beyond, and the other end opens through a simple porch onto the road that connected the peninsula on which Boston was founded to the mainland beyond. The State Street end is elaborated by statues of a lion and a unicorn bracketing the facade gable as emblems of the crown, and by an amply-proportioned door frame and balcony that project from the second level to make a place suitable for proclamations and pronouncements. This face of the Old State House is a perfect representation of government by decree and was a logical focus for protest. Not surprising, then, that it set the scene for the Boston Massacre.

The Boston State House, designed in 1795 by Charles Bulfinch for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, represents government in an entirely different way (Figure II). It presents a broad, accessible side to the populus, not a narrow declaratory end, and its facade is graced by what was then a spectacular porch, surely broad enough to hold the entire legislative assembly. The tall lantern is here replaced by a gleaming dome, unmistakably a landmark, lodged high on Beacon Hill, the summit of the peninsula. Here are the embodied aspirations of a new beginning (with, to be sure, a Tory cast). The building is set out with a grandeur that was simply unknown in that place at that time, calling forth an intention to reach the levels of sophistication only then emerging in England, and to do so with an expansiveness worthy of the new Commonwealth. The building reads as a complex unity, with the Senate and Governor's chambers in wings to either side, and the House of Representatives resplendent beneath the dome. The whole is accessible through a broad arcade at the ground level and is given an extraordinary sense of largesse by the tall columns that measure out the aforementioned porch above. The porch is adjacent to the assembly rooms on the second floor—aloof still, but nonetheless expansive and inviting to the mind.

The State House was subsequently enlarged, keeping pace with the prosperity and complexity of the Commonwealth. The successive stages are instructive. The first expansions were minor pragmatic additions to the rear of the building that provided some extra space and convenience. In the last decade of the nineteenth century a major expansion transformed the nature of the building, absorbing the original into a vast brick palace that extended across

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FIGURE II. *Charles Bulfinch's State House, Boston, Mass. (1795) (Photo: Alice Wingwall)*

the crest of the hill. It was executed, however, in the Classical motifs established in the original building, slightly updated to suit the sensibility of a later generation. The extended building provides a new and grander room for the House of Representatives, a great amount of office space, rows of corridor in which to lobby, rooms memorializing the Civil War, and an array of broad internal stairs connecting the various places of office and assembly to a carriage portico that is formed underneath the buildings as it bridges over Mt. Vernon Street. What is of principal note in this stage of expansion is that the architect, Charles Brigham, used a great deal of ingenuity in accommodating the expanded scope of government, yet he worked within a formal vocabulary that is a direct continuation of the traditions adopted by Bulfinch nearly a century before. Note too that the business of governance (conducted in top hats, we may suppose) was a principal activity to be accommodated by the extension.

The Brigham addition was not the end of the State House expansion story. During World War I another addition was undertaken, this by less adventurous architects, Chapman, Sturgis & Andrews. They were perhaps embarrassed by the bravura of

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Brigham's transformation, for they designed their addition as two wings forming courts to either side of the Bulfinch State House, completely isolating it from the addition. Their buildings also refer to the Classical traditions, but in a vapid, modestly-scaled manner that leaves the original State House in clear command. Here the heritage of Bulfinch's design is considered an antique to be cherished and displayed rather than a guiding force in the contemporary imagination.

The elements of the Bulfinch design are similar to those which characterize the national Capitol and which were in turn emulated by the majority of state capitols: a balanced three-part composition with a crowning dome at the center and a large portico facing broadside, executed in a version of the Classical protocols for form that trace back through England, France, and Italy, to Rome and thence to Greece. The lineage of these forms is so complex that they have been, at various times, associated with the Enlightenment (as here), Greek democracy, republican virtue, and Roman imperialism—to say nothing of Renaissance idealism and, more notoriously, fascism.

San Francisco and the Imperial Style

Roman imperialism was probably closest to the mark at the turn of the century, a period bracketed, for our purposes, by the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. The former created a nationwide thirst for grand Classical orders and sweeping vistas, while the latter implanted freely-interpreted stucco versions of imperial grandeur by the side of San Francisco Bay, where one fragment still stands. The dome of the Palace of Fine Arts, designed by Bernard Maybeck, has been recast in concrete to mark one section of the city and to hover permanently over the imaginations of its citizens.

The City Beautiful movement, prompted by the 1893 Exposition, led to a spate of civic centers, as architects and politicians sought ways to make government investment serve more than isolated purposes. In 1915, along with the Exposition, San Francisco erected a city hall worthy to be a state capitol (or at least a French war monument). It is the centerpiece of an ambitious scheme for a civic center that now includes a library, opera house, civic auditorium, concert hall and museum, a state office building, and a federal building (Figure III). Most recently a symphony

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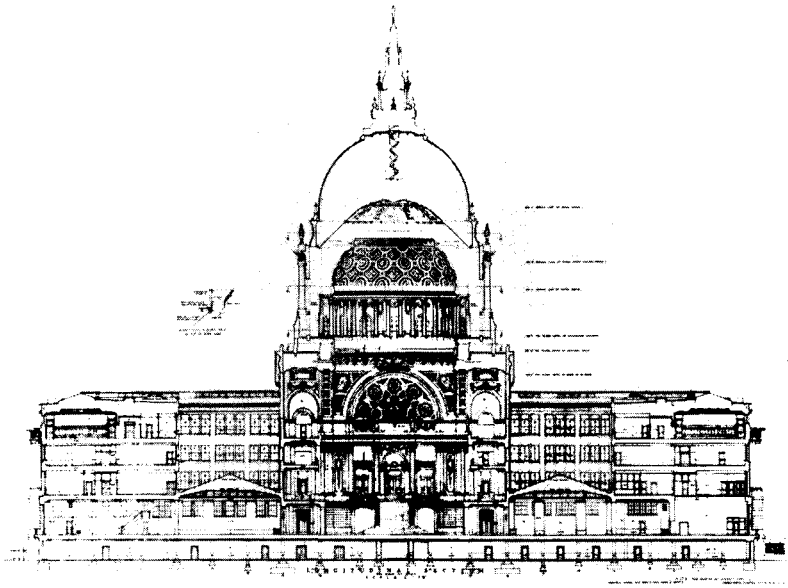

FIGURE III. *Plan for San Francisco City Hall (1915) (Rendering by Wethe, Frick & Krise, Architects)*

hall has been added, a suitable coda to the inclination towards epic visions that the civic center represents.

The San Francisco Civic Center, though much admired for the singleminded skill with which it was executed, remains incomplete and largely unpleasant. It founders on the inherent limits of a vision of public life that is cast only in institutional terms. The refinements of civic aspiration and established culture were meant to be unsullied by commerce (or rabble-rousers) and are instead surrounded by automobiles and haunted by vagrants. The spaces of the Center, designed solely for effect and cut through by wide streets, are simply too large for the foggy wind-swept reality of San Francisco. As symbol they suffer, for their significance is not reinforced by experience. Despite rows of clipped trees, they are unpleasant to be around and they make no satisfactory connection with the form of the adjoining city. The possible exceptions are the various performance halls which are closely packed across the back of the complex, divided from it by Van Ness Avenue, but linked thereby to a major artery of the city. These places of performance and assembly do provide a number of differing occasions to visit the Center but they are mostly institutions of elite interest; even the attendant cafes and bookstores are relegated to areas outside the Center, leaving a dark void in front of City Hall,

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FIGURE IV. *State Capitol, Lincoln, Neb. (Photo: Harald Dreimanis)*

an arbored expanse that seems at night rather like an urban version of Sherwood Forest.

The crowning glory of the City Hall is a grand rotunda, an ornate dome that marks the center of the domain. Inside this rotunda the experience of the place is intensely concentrated, with elaborate and spirited decorations arrayed about the surfaces of the dome and surrounding colonnades, and enormous medallions in the four corners of the dome's supporting structure that are carved with allegorical figures. (Though comely, these figures may be as obscure to many citizens as the Jedi are to me.) Recently the American Institute of Architects held a Beaux Arts Ball, a black tie and costume celebration inside the rotunda, with dancing up

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and down the magnificent great stair that descends from the civic rooms on the second floor to the floor of the rotunda. It was a splendid way of appropriating a civic symbol to personal experience, but only for the professional society and its friends and patrons who were willing and able to pay the rather hefty price of admission. For some there were also grim echoes of 1960, when the local newspapers carried full-page photographs of protestors being washed down the stairs with fire hoses.

Nebraska and Santa Barbara: new departures

During the next phase of building for public institutions, the decades following World War I, the Classical formula was adopted with numbing regularity, but two new departures did take place. One had to do with forging new formal means to express the aspirations of government; the other was involved with shaping urban complexes in a gentler, more approachable manner that paid closer attention to local context. The former is best represented by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue's great tower for the unicameral Nebraska State Capitol. The other is marvelously illustrated by the Santa Barbara County Court House. They serve different levels of government, but also pose different conceptions of how public buildings are to be built.

Goodhue's capitol, like many others, sits on its own block of land and may be approached from all sides (Figure IV). Unlike most others, however, it abandons the specific emblems of dome and portico and three-part division in favor of a single monumental shaft that stands as a marker, large enough to be seen from miles around as a centering beacon. From its top a heroically-sized figure of the sower appears to cast seeds to the wind. The tower is very handsomely shaped, with carefully sculpted modulations as it rises from a broad mass of office and assembly rooms at the base to the slim, largely useless but expressive tower. The tower easily captures the imagination. Here, in the plains of Nebraska, this one draws on the wonder of New York, city of towers, then still a promising vision of the new world.[1]

[1] Coincidentally, as Richard Oliver has observed in his book on Goodhue, both Wallace Harrison and Raymond Hood, principal architects in the development of Rockefeller Center, earlier worked for Goodhue on the Nebraska State Capitol. There they acquired some of the formal ideas later used to design one of the finest and most influential office complexes in the world, an instance of city-building on a large scale. Working with the towering office blocks and the theaters, plazas, and ground level shops, they give expressive force to a

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FIGURE V. *Arch of Santa Barbara County Court House (1929) (Photo: Gerald Allen & Associates)*

The architects of the Santa Barbara County Court House took a very different tack, surely prompted by the site and climate and the nature of county government. The building has no distinct form. Its rooms and open corridors are instead ranged around the edge of a county-scaled courtyard, like a thick wall open on the end to views of the surrounding town and mountains. This too eschews the traditional elements of building ordinarily associated with government. The forms used here associate rather with an imagined Spanish past. It is a glorified *hacienda* built on a scale that Spanish California never knew. Hispanic architecture had been officially adopted shortly before as the appropriate model to use in

complex of unprecedented dimension. Harrison in turn was a member of the United Nations design team, where the massive administrative block of the Secretariat has become a dominating symbol, with the softly formed General Assembly building placed to one side at its base; the whole isolated from its surroundings—a manager's view of government.

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rebuilding Santa Barbara after its partial destruction in an earthquake. The court house is in this adopted style, but in other ways as well it is almost the opposite of the San Francisco example. There are almost none of the overt, conventional symbols of government; the memorability of the place has to do with your experience in it. The court becomes a center of experience in the town because it is nicely made and can be richly inhabited. It fosters the dignity of all who enter there. Registering these qualities can lead to a respect for the place and for the government that it represents. The most overt symbol is itself one that refers to the larger setting—a grand arch that forms the entry, not into the building, but into the courtyard, with a magnificent view of the Santa Barbara mountains framed through the opening as you pass under it (Figure V). This is a building that serves its purposes by reminding us of the place to which it belongs.

Beverly Hills: the contemporary mood

A competition held in the summer of 1982 for a civic center for Beverly Hills, California, tells much about the current situation regarding the design of public buildings. It was forthrightly intended to be an act of city-building, and the new buildings were clearly intended to supplement rather than replace the existing city hall. The present building, designed in 1931, has a nine story tower and is rendered in vaguely Hispanic motifs. It lacks the expressive power of the Nebraska State Capitol and fails to create the evocative ambience of the Santa Barbara County Court House, but has nonetheless attracted the affections and allegiance of its citizens. The program was intended to reorganize and expand the facilities that house various services of government—fire and police departments, a jail, library, and meeting hall—and to provide a large parking facility that would serve both these activities and the adjacent merchants, providing, meanwhile, a revivified sense of civic pride and a valuable thrust of new development at the lesser end of the business district. Six architectural firms were invited to enter a limited competition for the project, each firm one that has achieved national recognition for innovative design. It was a highly select list that included only two architects from California and none that could be expected to treat the commission in a routine manner. The competition was managed with uncommon thoroughness. Each firm was paid a fee to develop initial designs and to present them in models and drawings with

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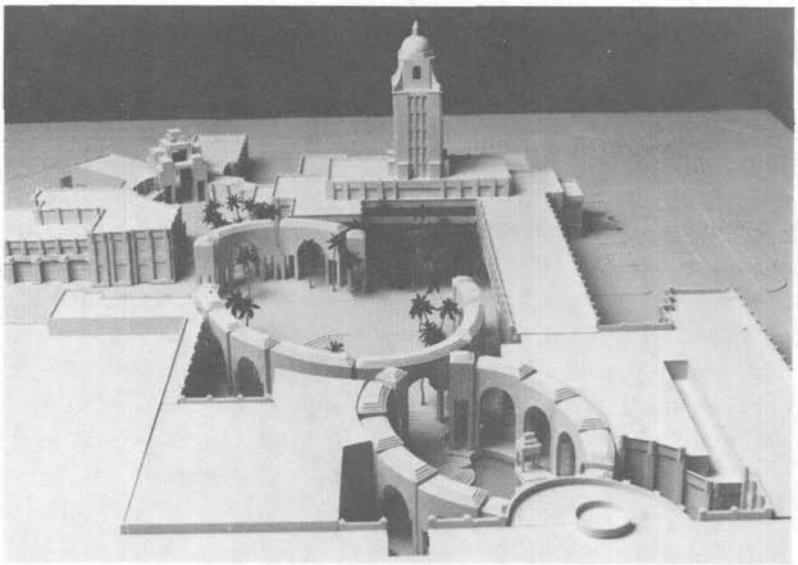

FIGURE VI. *Model of Charles Moore's Design for Beverly Hills Civic Center (Photo: Ruth Nadel)*

cost estimates. These were then examined carefully and in minute detail by representatives of each of the agencies to be housed and by the professional adviser. They were also placed on public display with opportunity for comments from the citizenry. Each of the schemes was reviewed by a jury consisting of several distinguished architects, a landscape architect, and an architectural critic. The professional jury then selected one scheme to be recommended to the City Council for approval. City Council action followed some weeks later and was unanimous in approving the jury's choice of the entry prepared by Charles W. Moore and the Urban Innovations Group of UCLA. Work is now proceeding through contract documents to construction with minor revisions.

An examination of the several entries to the competition reveals that many of the attitudes and problems previously discussed still establish the context in which architectural decisions are made for a project of this sort. How to treat the existing building, what forms to use in the new architecture, how civic buildings might best relate to the spaces and activities around them, how most effectively to use the taxpayers' money to shape a segment of the city—all these considerations were added to the functional considerations of city facilities.

One of the principal decisions to be made was how to reconcile the desire for a unified civic center with the divisive reality of

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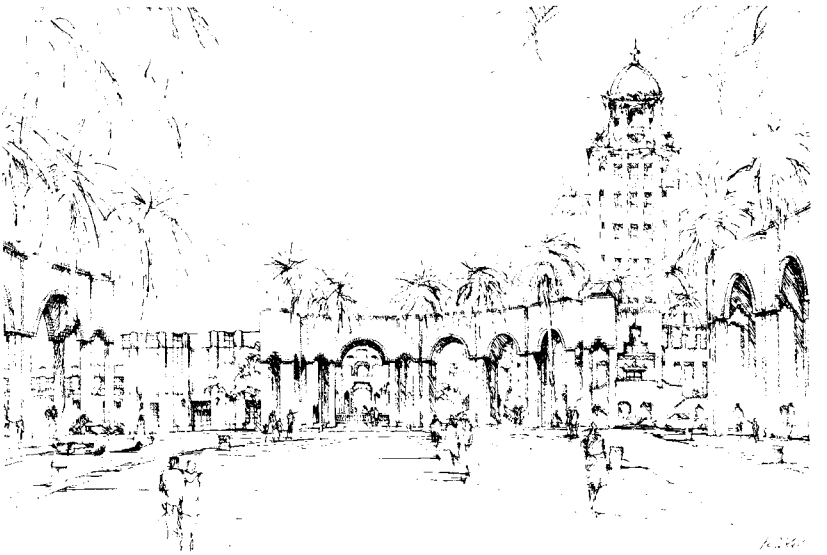

FIGURE VII. *Artist's Conception of Moore's Civic Center Scheme (Rendering by William Hersey)*

the site, which straddled two sides of a street and had the city hall on one side and most of the available space on the other. Two of the schemes accepted this division and fronted it with colonnades, leaving the city hall to stand more or less on its own, accompanied in one case by a formal park, in the other by a fire station. Two other schemes closed the street, linking the city hall tower and the auxiliary facilities by a great, shapely-terraced mall. Two bridged the street, one with an independent, fantastically-shaped building, the other (Charles Moore's) with a long wing that arches over the street, linking the new structure to the old. The significant difference in Moore's scheme, however, is that the divisive geometry of the existing street axis is subordinated by more powerful architectural themes, themes that unify the site and transform it into a place of special significance.

The themes that Moore develops are akin to those of the Santa Barbara County Court House (not coincidentally, since he was the first to introduce this precedent into contemporary discussions of architectural theory). As with its Santa Barbara ancestor, the most important elements of the Beverly Hills complex are open spaces shaped by the buildings (Figure VI). In this case a series of three open courtyards, elliptical in configuration, are lined up along a pedestrian axis that cuts diagonally across the site. The central and largest of these courts is formed around the in-

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tersection of diagonal axis and existing cross street. It creates an automobile arrival court that serves also as entry to the public parking structure. The courtyards are given their shape by tall surrounding arcades which also house a succession of ramps, stairs, and passages that accommodate the various types of pedestrian movement that are required and encouraged by the site.

Whereas Charles Brigham, in his extension to the Boston State House, adopted with only slight modifications the formal vocabulary of Bulfinch's original design—the classical columns, pilasters, and pediments—Moore has taken the vocabulary of the early Beverly Hills City Hall and made it more scenic, even cinematographic. The fundamental proportions and sizes of the earlier building are used again in the new design, the height of the main mass of the building controls the height of the new structures, the bay spacing of elements along the wall is the same, and the new structure, like the old, is made of concrete and decorated sparingly with tiles. The differences are that the arcades and passages are for everyday use, not just for ritual observances such as reviewing parades and receiving dignitaries, and they are not only for the business of government (Figure VII). These arcades are cinematographic in that they encourage the moving, roaming eye and the gliding step; they will engage the users of the place as participants in, not only observers of, the admittedly-staged drama of the civic center. The pleasures of being there are meant to become fused with the connotations of civic pride and the protections and services provided by good government. The risk of the scheme is that it depends on the experience of these places being pleasant, on there being enough civic pride and good management to maintain them well and to make a continuing investment in the landscape of the place. Without care they can become a fresco of bad government.

Though none of the other competitors used building elements that closely resembled those of the original building, they all used the older building in a rigidly symbolic way. In each case they isolated it as a singular presence on the site, allowing its form to dominate the entire complex, and treating it with the isolated respect that makes the old feel alien. They have made their proposed new buildings skillfully, in some cases using the familiar symbols of civic grandeur, colonnades, and well-formed piazzas, though stripped of superfluous Classical refinements. In two instances the whole site was transformed into terraced hanging gardens. In one, Moshe Safdie's much-admired scheme, a block-

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FIGURE VIII. *Model of Moshe Safdie's Design for Beverly Hills Civic Center (Photo: Ruth Nadel)*

FIGURE IX. *Model of Frank Gehry's Design for Beverly Hills Civic Center (Photo: Ruth Nadel)*

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long reflecting pool is centered on the city hall tower, and the other building forms are so completely hidden by terraces and pavilions that the older building looms larger than life over a scene of Shangri-La splendor (Figure VIII). The Moore scheme, while building in a manner consistent with the initial city hall, does not make it an iconic object. Instead, it makes a larger place which is very distinct, filled both with useful facilities and experiential incident, for which the city hall tower is but the most visible and familiar landmark. It extends, where others would embalm, the significance of the 1930s building.

In most of the schemes presented to the City Council the dominant images were of physical connection—arcades, colonnades, sweeping terraces. Frank Gehry, the other Californian, posed the only alternative concept (Figure IX). The various elements of his scheme were disposed around the site as isolated buildings jostling against each other as though competitors in a land speculation venture. For Gehry, as for many others, this seems to have been the archetypal "Los Angeles" scheme, the ultimate westward expression of freedom of opportunity. These are discrete approachable eccentric buildings untroubled by any subordinating vision, using the consolidated municipally-owned site as so many building plots to be exploited. The proposal has an ingratiating charm, an appearance at once familiar and make-believe. However, like so many restored Old Towns, it strains credulity as it attempts to be beguiling. What the Gehry scheme misses (most likely with intention) is that part of the "California quest" and "American dream" which sought not only opportunity, but solace—which longed to find a place where the land and the sun could, with some vision (and a little northern California water), be fashioned into Arcadian splendor. That dream, no less than the "City Upon a Hill" that led the founders of Boston, requires a covenant—if not with God or nature, then with ourselves.

Restoring the civic pact

The public places that we build help express the nature of that implicit social pact we make with each other. That civic pact should include a respect for the places in which we live, a commitment to continue building a city to which we can all belong, and a determination to infuse public architecture with a sense of human dignity.

To embody all this in building requires attending to more than

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the pragmatic and circumstantial. It requires a sense of human purpose. And it needs an ability and willingness to use the mysteries of the sympathetic imagination to reach beyond the confines of institutional definition—to know the character of places and the many ways we can inhabit them. The architect's goal should be to embody an understanding of the public weal through building in a way that captures the mind, as symbols must, yet allows a freedom and complexity of individual experience. Then it becomes possible to make connections between individual interests and common values. In great architecture, each subsequent generation will see not only the interests and aspirations of our time, but its own interests and those of its heirs as well.

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• CONTRIBUTORS •

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The triumph of the Capitol

MICHAEL A. SCULLY

Two newspapers of the period, in Maryland and Boston, published the same account, datelined Georgetown, September 21, 1793: "On Wednesday last one of the grandest Masonic processions took place, for the purpose of laying the cornerstone of the Capitol of the United States.... The procession marched two abreast, in the greatest solemn dignity, with music playing, drums beating, colors flying and spectators rejoicing." The stern General Washington, by then President, laid a silver plate, on top of a cut stone, in a hole in the ground, on a hill called Jenkins' Heights that overlooked a swamp. In the next 200 years, a hundred such ceremonies in every part of the globe would express the hopes of decolonized peoples against the smirk of history. So much hope, and so little reason to be hopeful. Here was the first of them, and typically, it chose for the site of its capital city—its Brasilia—a marshy wilderness.

What was in Washington's mind that day? Let us assume he saw a mall, a great plaza stretching from that hill two and a half miles to the Potomac, for that was the plan. And if he could not have foreseen, precisely, the Pennsylvania veteran with his yellow VFW tee-shirt, plaid jacket, and baseball cap I saw recently treading the Capitol grounds, or the two score families with craned-up necks standing beneath the Capitol rotunda, let us assume he

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foresaw their children's eyes, bulging in amazement at what is theirs.

Grandeur, simplicity, and convenience

What would sit atop that hill, that "pedestal waiting for a monument," as the city's planner, Charles Pierre L'Enfant, had called it? Only recently had it been decided.

On March 24, 1792 an advertisement appeared in the *Gazette of the United States* offering "a premium of a lot in the city" and "$500, or a medal of that value" to the person who produced the "most approved" plan for the Capitol. (A similar offer was made at about the same time, soliciting plans for the "President's House.") The advertisement listed specifications for rooms to be included in the design. There was to be a conference room and a room for Representatives, each large enough to accommodate 300 persons. The instructions called for a lobby or antechamber to the Representatives' room, and another to the Senate room, which itself was to measure 1,200 square feet. These rooms and lobbies were to be "full of elevation." In addition to these, the solicitation mandated "twelve rooms of 600 square feet each for committee rooms and clerks, to be half the elevation" of the major rooms and lobbies.

A dozen or more plans were received in the four months allowed by the advertisement, none of them judged wholly satisfactory by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia—who kept in frequent communication with President Washington. Indeed, one of the principal historians of the city, H. Paul Caemmerer, notes that Washington took "personal interest in the selection of the design." So much so, says Caemmerer, that, "In fact the decision seems to have rested almost entirely with him."

Three plans were returned to their authors with requests for revisions, but by the end of August 1792 there was still no plan thought satisfactory. The Commissioners then engaged a French immigrant, Stephen Hallet—whose plan had interested the Commissioners—to prepare a new design. Hallet moved to Washington and began to work on a new plan, which by the next January he still had not completed.

In the meantime another design had been offered, and in early February 1793 the Commissioners noted their general satisfaction with it. Caemmerer described the architect in a paper delivered to the Columbia Historical Society in 1943:

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FIGURE I. *William Thornton's Original Design for the East Elevation of the Capitol (Photo: Library of Congress)*

> . . . Dr. William Thornton, a 'physician, architect, poet, and horse-racer,' born in the West Indies and trained abroad, a man of culture and technical bent of mind, who was living in Philadelphia, heard of the competition for a capitol building while visiting his native town of Tortola. Architecture was his avocation, and in 1789 he had won a competition for the first public library to be erected in the country in Philadelphia.

Thus Thornton's design was selected, and with a number of alterations—many lobbied for by Hallet, who for a time was supervisor of construction—Thornton's plan was built. The design was of a modified Palladian style (Figure I).

In March 1793, Thornton arrived in the city of Washington. He brought with him a letter of introduction from President Washington to the Commissioners. (The seat of government was then still in Philadelphia.) Washington wrote of the Thornton design that "Grandeur, simplicity, and convenience appear to be so well combined in this plan of Dr. Thornton's." If anything Jefferson was even more effusive: "The grandeur, simplicity, and beauty of the exterior, the propriety with which the departments are distributed, and the economy in the mass of the whole structure, recommend this plan." Wrote Jefferson somewhat later, "Thornton's plan had captivated the eyes and the judgment of all. It is simple, noble, beautiful, excellently arranged, and moderate in size." And, Jefferson noted, "among its admirers none are more decided than he whose decision is most important"—meaning, of course, Washington.

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Several years ago, a group that included several distinguished scholars toured the Capitol. Entering the old Senate chamber—recently refurbished—one of the party, a noted historian, said in a kind of whispered gasp, "My, they *really* knew what a republic was all about." Washington's and Jefferson's descriptions of Thornton's plan demonstrate as much: beauty, yet simplicity; grandeur, yet moderation in size; convenience and economy of mass. Even with its subsequent changes and expansions, more than enough truth remains in these first words of approval to set the Capitol apart. Other of Washington's buildings, most from necessity and some from deficient sensibility, violate these prescriptions. Yet the Capitol remains too measured for the potentate, too grand for the populist—the product of an epoch that at once proclaimed republican government and remembered the appropriateness, even to self-governing men and women, of lofty sentiments.

"It is a sign"

In 1803, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, one of America's few professionally-trained architects at that time, succeeded William Thornton as architect. Latrobe undertook refinements and expansions in the Thornton design. The Capitol dome was completed. Changes were made in Thornton's design for the East portico, and a dramatic departure was taken from Thornton's scheme for the West facade. Yet Latrobe's work, a decade in the making, was finished only a short time before the British sacked Washington in 1814 and—after great effort—managed to set the Capitol ablaze. Frustrated in their initial attempts, British troops finally piled chairs and desks and set them ablaze beneath the Capitol rotunda. The hemisphere, then made of wood and masonry, collapsed. When the architect returned to Washington in 1815, little was left of his Capitol: two burnt and ransacked ends, connected by a demolished and burnt-out middle. It was, said Latrobe, "a most magnificent ruin."

For the next two years, Latrobe supervised a reconstruction that included enlargement of the Senate chamber and redesign of the old House chamber (now Statuary Hall). After a disagreement with the Commissioner of Public Buildings in 1817, however, Latrobe was replaced by another architect—the first American-born Capitol architect—Charles Bulfinch of Boston. Bulfinch had traveled widely throughout the United States and Europe after graduating from Harvard in 1781. Architecture had begun as an avoca-

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tion for him, but financial setbacks forced him to turn to it as a source of income. By the time he was enlisted as the third architect of the Capitol, he had designed the Massachusetts State House (1795), the New South Church (1814), and the Lancaster Meeting House (1816-17). Lonelle Aikman, author of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society's guide to the Capitol, describes Bulfinch's Washington tenure this way:

> To Bulfinch goes the credit for completing the Capitol as Thornton and Latrobe had planned it. He worked out the remaining structural details of the Senate and House chambers. . . . and Bulfinch carried through the building's long-planned central portion, including its east and west fronts, and a central Rotunda covered by a low copper-sheathed dome.

Bulfinch remained in Washington for thirteen years, by which time his work was completed and Congress had abolished the position of Capitol architect. Not until 1851 would there be another. By then, the nation's expansion to 26 states—which meant the Senate's growth to 52 members and the House's to more than eleven score—necessitated an enlargement of the Capitol. An appropriation of $100,000 was passed, and work begun on the expansion of the Capitol into the building that—despite some changes in the intervening century—we know today.

New wings were constructed for the House and Senate, with the old chambers coming to serve as walkways connecting the two wings and the Rotunda. Above all, literally and figuratively, there was the new Capitol dome, which made use of a new technology, and was the masterstroke of the fourth Capitol architect, Thomas Ustick Walter.

E.J. Applewhite, the author of *Washington Itself*, an outstanding guide to the city, describes the architectural lineage of the dome, and the symbolic importance it had from its origin:

> In the depths of the Civil War, Lincoln was criticized for continuing the construction of the Capitol, but his response was resolute: "If the people see the Capitol going on," he said, "it is a sign we intend the Union shall go on." So Walter and Meigs [of the Army Corps of Engineers] worked on the dome without stint, employing cast iron because it was fireproof and because it was stronger, lighter, and more versatile than stone. They took as their models Paris's Pantheon and Invalides, and also St. Isaac's Cathedral in Leningrad, completed in 1842 with one of the first great cast iron domes in Europe. Their accomplishment at the Capitol was a considerable technical tour de force, for they applied the only real innovation in dome engineering between the coffered masonry domes of Rome and the Renaissance and the prestressed concrete and geodesic domes of today.

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> The Capitol dome is Baroque in silhouette and scale. The cast iron structural elements of the outer shell are not concealed behind a veneer, although they are partially disguised as molded arches and columns with Corinthian capitals. It is Baroque in its huge mass, and in its complex and expansive composition that dominates the sweeping vistas of the Mall; its self-confidence derives from an exuberance restrained with dignity. Some guides will tell you that the 36 columns around the base are for the 36 states of the Union at the time it was built and that the 13 columns of the lantern atop the dome stand for the original colonies—which are nice thoughts, but in fact there were only 32 states when the dome was completed and the lantern has only 12 columns.[1]

The dome—actually, there are inner and outer domes trussed to withstand the stresses of climate-caused expansions and contractions—weighs 9 million pounds and stands 285 feet above the eastern plaza. Thomas Crawford's statue of Freedom sits atop the dome, ten platinum-tipped lightning rods fixed to her shoulders and helmet. The drum of the dome, reminiscent of the drum of St. Peter's in Rome, is extended at its base beyond the structural supports of Bulfinch's dome, which in Walter's design still carry most of the structure's weight.

Still to come are decades of improvement. Inside, the great Brumidi painted, "to make beautiful the Capitol of the one country on earth in which there is liberty." Outside, the nation's greatest landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, had, by the time of Brumidi's death in 1880, undertaken the landscaping of the grounds and the addition of the walkways and sweeping stairways that lead from Pennsylvania Avenue up the West front of the Capitol (Figure II).

There would be other artists, and in time other changes. Filippo Costaggini would work for eight years following Brumidi's death on the dome's circular frieze. Sixty-five years later, Allyn Cox would begin to close the 31-foot gap unfinished by Costaggini. Seven giant paintings of historic scenes would hang inside the Rotunda, to remind us of such tidal events as the Pilgrims' embarkation, the surrender of Cornwallis, and Washington resigning his commission in 1783. Still to come were statues from every state, so many that they now clutter the halls. They are inspiring, or pious, or lifelike, or stiff, or ugly. And there have been changes, the most important being the extension of the East Front of the Capitol by some 32 feet in 1959 and 1960, a favorite project of House Speaker Sam Rayburn. (Extension was first proposed by Walter,

[1] E.J. Applewhite, *Washington Itself* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

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FIGURE II. *The Capitol, West Facade (Photo: Architect of the Capitol Collection)*

as its defenders testily remind us.) Another major alteration, that of the West facade, has been a smoldering, occasionally flaming, controversy for over two decades. Wrote Wolf von Eckardt of this Rayburn expansion plan:

> The vastly enlarged marble version was to extend the old building by up to 88 feet and to house cafeterias for tourists, truck-loading platforms and hideaway offices for deserving members. This folly was to cost $58 million in 1969 dollars.
>
> It would have destroyed not only the Capitol's earliest history, but also its most endearing feature—the grand terraces that gracefully elevate the building above the mall and which were designed almost 100 years ago by Frederick Law Olmsted, America's greatest landscape architect.

A later plan, by the current Architect of the Capitol, George M. White, would have considerably shrunk the Rayburn plan, left Olmsted's terraces alone, and yet added 160,000 square feet to the structure. Recently, the Congress opted for restoration of the West facade, rather than expansion. This leaves the Rayburn House Office Building, the most notable reminder of that legislator's taste in public buildings.

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At least in a general way, each of the eras of Washington architecture has a representative on Capitol Hill. Yet in almost every case, be the building triumphant or mediocre, grand and efficient or gross and inefficient, its style is mediated by the appropriate prejudice that Capitol Hill is of a piece, and the Capitol is its centerpiece.

The great exception, of course, is the Library of Congress. Twenty-four years from its design to its completion, its construction delayed by more than a decade of haggling, it was conceived in an era different from the one in which it was born. The Library of Congress is the only Capitol Hill building that might be said to compete with the Capitol. It has, for example, its own dome. Its facing is a purple-gray granite. When it opened in 1897, its features were derided by at least one architectural critic; in the decades that followed, such words would be applied to it as "a dreadful medley" and "overlavish." Franklin Roosevelt ("gingerbread," he said) wanted it resurfaced and its dome removed. In the last decade of its construction, an important new movement was taking shape ("The City Beautiful"), and within a half-dozen years of the Library's completion the L'Enfant Plan for Washington—disregarded for decades—would be reinstituted, and it would matter that this Italian Renaissance palace of knowledge completely blocked L'Enfant's planned vista from Pennsylvania Avenue Southeast to the Capitol and beyond to the Mall. Designed eight years after Lincoln's assassination, completed three years before Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, there it sits.

Wrote Dreiser of Carrie's lovers, they were "the titled ambassadors of comfort and peace, aglow with their credentials. It is but natural that when the world which they represented no longer allured her, its ambassadors should be discredited." The original Library of Congress building *is* an ambassador from a gilded age (19 artists worked on its 112 murals, 22 sculptors on its embellishments), but as with an old, perhaps once-wanton ambassador, all is by now forgiven—his antique courtliness is cherished in the era of the un-held door.

"The City Beautiful"

To both Capitol Hill and the city generally, no movement of architectural sensibility mattered more than the City Beautiful Movement, which lasted from the 1890's to the First World War. Represented in Washington by the McMillan Commission in 1901,

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it was chiefly influenced by Daniel H. Burnham, architect of Union Station, advisor to the Commission, and initiator of the enormously influential Chicago Exposition in 1893, which had fixed attention on architecture and city beautification.

In the second of her two volumes on the history of the city of Washington, Constance McLaughlin Green describes the McMillan Commission's importance both to the city and the City Beautiful Movement:

> The fame of the members appointed to the commission added weight to their recommendations; every American concerned with "city beautiful" knew of architects Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, of the sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens, and of the son of Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who had laid out New York's Central Park and the grounds of the Capitol. The dimensions of the plan for the public domain in the national capital, moreover, stirred the most sluggish imagination. Americans who had never set foot in Washington or studied L'Enfant's original layout were suddenly eager to see it revived and elaborated. Thus, as the details became known the project for Washington gave impetus to city planning throughout the country.

The McMillan Commission plan reinstituted the essentials of the L'Enfant plan for the city, while accepting as unchangeable such major departures as the locations of the already-constructed State Department building, the Library of Congress, and the Treasury Building—all of which cut off L'Enfant-planned vistas. Writes Green of the period:

> The return to neo-classical architecture for government buildings pleased a public tired of the vagaries of the preceding half-century—the romantic red sandstone Norman castle of the Smithsonian, the mansard-roofed Department of Agriculture. . . . the State Department building, the heavy square-towered Post Office on Pennsylvania Avenue, and the ornate Italian Renaissance Library of Congress. Uniformity of style and the use of marble and pale gray granite became the rule. . . .

The City Beautiful Movement is well-represented on Capitol Hill. Union Station was designed by Burnham, and was the first Washington building to reflect the stylistic taste of the McMillan Commission (Figure III). It is of Roman beaux-arts design and, as one architectural guidebook puts it, "direct from the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago." Union Station was built in 1908. A half dozen years later, Burnham co-designed the City Post Office, adjacent to the Station in such a fashion as to assure that

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FIGURE III. *Union Station Nearing Completion (1980) (Photo: Library of Congress)*

the newer structure harmonizes with the older without competing for the viewer's attention.[2]

Capitol Hill's greatest debt to the City Beautiful Movement, however, might well be the Old House and Old Senate Office Buildings—now called, respectively, the Cannon and Russell Buildings (Figure IV). Built in 1908 by the firm of Carrere and Hastings (with the former responsible for the Senate building, the latter for the House), they are very much of a piece, without being identical. Interestingly, they were attacked when they opened. The *New York Times* criticized the Russell building for its size, calling it "a building that a thousand men would feel lonesome in." Nevertheless, there has yet to be built—after four intervening attempts—a congressional office building in the same league with the Cannon and Russell buildings.

Recall that when they were built, there were only two other important public buildings on Capitol Hill—the Capitol itself, and at some remove from the Capitol's East front, the Library of Congress. The House or Senate member would walk from either wing of the Capitol to his respective office building. To his side would

[2] In the 1970's, a renovation of Union Station's main waiting room and concourse into a National Visitors Center was begun, and enormous sums were spent before the project faltered. The results were horrific. With the train-arrival area moved to a new building in the rear, the result was a hall only Albert Speer could love. Thus the architectural message of the Visitors Center was: All you who enter here are dwarves. For reasons financial and aesthetic, the renovation has ceased and there are now plans to repair the damage.

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FIGURE IV. *The Russell Senate Office Building (1908) (Photo: Library of Congress)*

be the Capitol's landscaped grounds. He would cross Independence or Constitution Avenues to the nearest office-building entrance. In either case, he would climb a white stone staircase. Inside, he would walk through column-filled corridors some 20 feet high, but only after crossing through a rotunda. Even the underground passages from the Capitol end in rotundas in each building's basement.

The Cannon and Russell buildings are indeed large buildings—each built to house offices for the full membership and their staffs at that time. Each takes up an entire city block. Yet neither proclaims: "You are a little man, a superfluity."

It is 1908, and already the need for Congressional office space has overwhelmed the chance for republican architecture. The nation has changed, and never again on Capitol Hill will we hear those first words of approval: "simple," "economy in the mass of the whole structure," "moderate in size." No sensitive historian will proclaim, "*They* really knew what a republic was all about." Perhaps they did know, but circumstance had precluded the chance to tell. Each of the old office buildings, at over a half-million gross square feet, had to "speak" of other things.

They speak of greatness and the public enterprise. Forced from simplicity, still they have not forsaken nobility nor forgotten that grandeur does not proceed from size alone. And there is yet another, subtler message: a whisper from the rotundas, a message never heard in the newer Congressional office buildings. It is the

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message of the spherical shape: *Politics is an art.* At the base, the columns are wide apart; the art is getting the ribs to meet at the top, in just proportion.

The newer office buildings have no rotundas. They are the children of their rationalist times. When the citizen is thought a building block, public buildings become boxes. The human body is all curves, and thus the sphere seems somehow natural to us. Yet the Rayburn House and Dirksen and Hart Senate buildings are all squares and 90-degree angles. What is wide at the base is equally wide at the top. The bases do not merge at the top; there is no just resolution appropriate to each part; the distant bottoms are equidistant at their tops; a ceiling connects the sides without any narrowing of their distance. It is all hard angles. Even a pork-barrel has a more human shape.

Modern times

Four major Capitol Hill buildings have been constructed since World War II and—less important for the Hill than for most of the "critical habitats" of American public life—since the rise of the modernist International school. None of these new buildings is a triumph, yet each tells us something of note about current confusions as well as the difficulties associated with building to suit the needs of the modern Congress, which now includes 535 members, 18,000 employees—and 9,000 parking spaces. (The Library of Congress, which began in earnest after the fire of 1814 when the Congress purchased Thomas Jefferson's library, now has some 19 million books and several times that number of total items in its collections.)

The effect of such demands on Congressional buildings has been predictably great. The Dirksen and Hart Senate buildings together have more than twice the gross square footage of the entire Capitol building (1.38 million gross square feet to the Capitol's 758,000). The Rayburn House building has 1.162 million gross square feet. The new Madison Library building and the original Library of Congress building are Capitol Hill's Mutt and Jeff. The old building, with 666,000 gross square feet, is one-third of size of the new one (1.976 million g.s.f.).

Racing is the sport of kings, but architectural criticism is the sport of Congressmen. In fairness to the architects of the Capitol and to the consulting architects who collaborate on individual projects, one must note that they work within (at least) three

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constraints. First, the demands for Congressional space and facilities require large buildings. Second, and quite properly, the height of Capitol Hill buildings (as of all buildings in the District of Columbia) is limited, lest any building compete visually with the Capitol's dome. Third, from the earliest plans for financing the Capitol (when it was thought that construction might be financed by auctioning off nearby government-owned lots—an utter flop), Congressional buildings have been favored places to display Congress's thriftiness. Great sums do get spent, but before the last bill is presented, panic sets in. Facilities and ornamentation invariably are discarded, and there is great wonder at how it all could have happened. In an institution where each year multi-millionaire members piously vote against increases in salaries (to the point that, say, a U.S. Senator might dare to get paid as much as a regional sales manager of a Fortune 500 corporation), phony displays of frugality are a tradition. Congressional buildings, like non-heir Congressmen and Senators, are easy targets for the cheap shot. All in all, we should be relieved and delighted that Capitol Hill remains as handsome as it does. No modern building competes with the Capitol. Even the Rayburn gargantua, though it blocks some nearby views of the Capitol from the Southwest, cannot be said to *compete* visually with the Capitol. It is too perfectly ignorable. Capitol Hill has been spared the Glass Box, and such Totalitarian Modern crimes as have been visited on Southwest Washington. That is no small cause for joy.

Nevertheless, things also might have turned out better. E.J. Applewhite begins his comment on the Rayburn building with a quotation from Robert Hughes's book *The Shock of the New*: "Authoritarian architecture must be clear and regular on the outside, and let the passing eye deduce nothing of what goes on inside." Indeed, the Rayburn building is so banal that one hardly can deduce what goes on inside when one is *inside*. A building whose principal purpose was, of course, to provide office space and committee rooms, less than a fifth of its floor space is devoted to those functions. Its corridors are dead-ends, leaving the visitor who mistakenly walks down the wrong crook of the maze no option but to retrace his steps. (If Charley ever gets off the MTA, he will never get out of the Rayburn building.)

Even when one has discounted for the demands placed on the new Congressional buildings, one cannot look at the Rayburn building without perceiving that it represents a great loss of sensibility. Greatness has become grossness. The Madison Library

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building is less offensive in this regard, but it repeats the error. The two dozen columns (not cylindrical, but rectangular) that bestride its main entrance induce a headache. They dwarf all who enter or pass by. For the most part, its other three sides are uninterrupted, unwindowed white marble.

The Madison building was built to hold over 12 million books and most of the staff of the Library of Congress, as well as to provide reading rooms and support services both to scholars and the public. Thus this building had to be huge. The original Library of Congress was criticized in 1898 by Russell Sturgis for "that false idea of grandeur which consists mainly in hoisting a building up . . . in order to secure for it a monstrous flight of steps which must be surmounted before the main door can be reached." Yet, ironically, something like a "monstrous flight of steps" to go with its already monstrous rectangular columns might have made the Madison building more welcoming.

The newest building on Capitol Hill is the Hart Senate Building, which opened late in 1982 (Figure V). Its exterior presents a grid of rectangular marble boxes. Inside, Le Corbusier's idea of "streets in the air" is faithfully executed.

The most remarked-upon feature of the building is its nine-story atrium, which rises at a 90-degree angle from the building's lobby to a skylight-roof with a grid pattern. The building was designed to house the personal staffs of fifty Senators; each Senator has a personal office sixteen feet high. Many of the Senate suites are duplexes, and many of the suites have rooms that overlook the atrium. This makes it possible to see from numerous positions inside the building the goings-on inside the staff rooms of Senators' offices. Yet, as Capitol architect George M. White points out, few staffers seem to have taken great pains to assure their privacy, and some of the vertical blinds have even been unscrewed and pushed into a quasi-permanent open position.[3]

[3] In time, all of the Hart offices will be filled with modular furniture. I am prejudiced on this point. Modular furniture seems to me to encourage a bureaucratic atmosphere in Senate offices (and everywhere, actually) that is worse than the evils of the huge carrier-deck desks and overcrowding that modular furniture is supposed to eliminate by providing everyone his or her "personal space." Senator Inouye complained in a Rules Committee hearing that the space dividers are made of "some crummy thing that looks like a dart board." Actually, they are not unlike the crummy things that divide the middling-level employees of every insurance company in America. The danger is that in a half dozen years the working environment of half the Senate's personal staffs will be no different from that of most federal employees: a bureaucratic slum. This is a feeling the Russell Building never conveys, even after three-quarters of a century, and vastly overcrowded, as it has been in recent

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FIGURE V. *The Hart Senate Office Building (1982) (Photo: Washington Post)*

Compared to its squatty neighbor, the Dirksen Building, the new Hart Building has refreshing aspects. The atrium at least provides a sense of space, and as one walks from the Dirksen into the new building one feels as though the person who has been sitting on one's head has finally climbed off.

Yet there is something wrong, and I would go so far as to say radically wrong, with the Hart Building. Simply put, it is not a public building, except in the most meaningless sense—that taxpayers paid for it. Because of last minute budget cuts, the building's ornamental pasties were never stuck on, so the building is barer than planned—*utterly* devoid of ornament. More important, the centerpiece of the nine-story atrium was not paid for, thus not delivered, and now a private fund is established to raise money for the art work. It is not, of course, a statue of Philip A. Hart, the Senator for whom the building is named. Rather, the centerpiece of the Philip A. Hart Senate Building is to be a multi-story mobile by Alexander Calder. This will perfect the Hart Building's fundamental flaw: Once the mobile arrives, the Hart Building will

years. The Dirksen Building, its ceilings too low to fit the great expanses of its hallways, its marble floors all out of place with its cheesily-painted halls, was a building born to age ungracefully.

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be *exactly* like a corporate office building, right down to the artistic embellishment that has nothing to do with the functions of those who labor there.

This is a genuine misfortune, for the Hart Building might have turned Capitol Hill building back toward the Capitol. The atrium is itself a breakthrough, and makes Hart the first Hill building in years that conveys a sense of space without making the visitor feel out of place. But it would have had to depart from its grid patterns. It would have to have had spaces fit for memorials to the men and women who spend their lives in such buildings and elevate our public life by their exertions. Instead, there is not a single crevice in the Hart Building in which a statue would not appear out of place.

Perhaps, indeed probably, Congress would have refused to pay for it (boxes are cheaper), and surely one cannot blame the architects for preferring professional respectability to an attempt that might have made them pariahs. But what does it say of our times, indeed, of the Senate, that at a cost of $150 million we produce as a Senatorial work environment an utterly non-public building, perfect for Lend-Lease to IBM, the University of Kansas, or lawyers in several similar buildings on K Street?

The triumph of the Capitol

Yet let us not lament too much lost opportunities, nor judge too harshly those who labored under constraints we are not privy to know. Let us rather rejoice that atop the natural pedestal that is America's greatest public space, there sits America's greatest public building. It is as good, as grand, as inspiring as any of the columned marchers in that first procession might have hoped.

In the end, after all the offices are filled, the corridors built columned or plain, in marble or granite or brick or sheet-rock, a public building succeeds or fails to the extent that it conveys a message that upholds the greatness of the governmental enterprise by which a free people somehow, remarkably, continue to govern themselves—against all odds, and all the smart money of history. This the Capitol conveys. And thus it succeeds in its purpose. It is one of a handful of the world's greatest buildings.

The Capitol offers a message to all who will hear. Many have heard it speak to them. Many more will hear its whisper in the centuries to come.

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"OUR BUILDINGS SHAPE US"

On the night of 10th May, 1941, with one of the last bombs of the last serious raid, our House of Commons was destroyed by the violence of the enemy, and we have now to consider whether we should build it up again, and how, and when. We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us. Having dwelt and served for more than forty years in the late Chamber, and having derived very great pleasure and advantage therefrom, I, naturally, should like to see it restored in all essentials to its old form, convenience, and dignity. I believe that will be the opinion of the great majority of its Members. It is certainly the opinion of His Majesty's Government, and we propose to support this Resolution to the best of our ability.

There are two main characteristics of the House of Commons which will command the approval and the support of reflective and experienced Members. They will, I have no doubt, sound odd to foreign ears. The first is that its shape should be oblong and not semi-circular. Here is a very potent factor in our political life. The semi-circular assembly, which appeals to political theorists, enables every individual or every group to move round the centre, adopting various shades of pink according as the weather changes. I am a convinced supporter of the party system in preference to the group system. I have seen many earnest and ardent Parliaments destroyed by the group system. The party system is much favoured by the oblong form of Chamber. It is easy for an individual to move through those insensible gradations from Left to Right, but the act of crossing the Floor is one which requires serious consideration. I am well informed on this matter, for I have accomplished that difficult process, not only once but twice. Logic is a poor guide compared with custom. Logic, which has created in so many countries semi-circular assemblies with buildings that give to every Member, not only a seat to sit in, but often a desk to write at, with a lid to bang, has proved fatal to Parliamentary Government as we know it here in its home and in the land of its birth.

The second characteristic of a Chamber formed on the lines of the House of Commons is that it should not be big enough to contain all its Members at once without overcrowding, and that there should be no question of every Member having a separate seat reserved for him. The reason for this has long been a puzzle to uninstructed outsiders, and has frequently excited the curiosity and even the criticism of new Members. Yet is not so difficult to understand if you look at it from a practical point of view. If the House is big enough to contain all its Members, nine-tenths of its Debates will be conducted in the depressing atmosphere of an almost empty or half-empty Chamber. The essence of good House of Commons speaking is the conversational style, the facility for quick, informal interruptions and interchanges. Harangues from a rostrum would be a bad substitute for the conversational style in which so much of our business is done. But the conversational style requires a fairly small space, and there should be on great occasions a sense of crowd and urgency. There should be a sense of the importance of much that is said, and a sense that great matters are being decided, there and then, by the House.

Winston S. Churchill
Speech to the House of Commons
October 28, 1943

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The city council chamber: from distance to intimacy

CHARLES T. GOODSELL

While the term "public space" ordinarily brings to mind outdoor squares, streets, and monuments, it can also refer to the interiors of public buildings. Indeed, interior spaces may be more significant in affecting citizens and expressing political ideas, because it is in enclosed public rooms such as lobbies and auditoriums that citizens are fully embraced by the physical environment. It is here that important public rituals and deliberations take place, and where we normally find the most concentrated architectural statements of official values and ideas.

The design of American city council chambers—the rooms in which municipal governing bodies formally convene—are therefore extremely relevant to our understanding of changes in urban political culture. These spaces reflect the political ideals of the age in which they were built, and continue to affect the attitudes and behavior of today's officials and citizens. The history of changes in chamber design is one chapter—an extremely important and usually ignored chapter—in American city politics.

The links between architecture and politics are subtle and indirect, of course. Unless they are totalitarian, political regimes do not dictate architectural styles; architects, not politicians, design buildings, and usually in response to reigning architectural tastes. But

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architects and their styles are also influenced by the same cultural ideas that affect, and are affected by, political leaders. This double movement of influence is especially apparent in the design of interior public chambers, where government officials become actively involved in planning the rooms where they will be on public display.

The history of city council chambers may be divided into three periods: the Traditional Era (1800-1930), the Mid-Century Era (1930-1960), and the Contemporary Era (1960-present). Moving through them, a general trend becomes clear: As the political distance between the governors and the governed has been reduced, a new "intimate" political relationship has been expressed in, and perhaps encouraged by, the design of city council chambers.

The Traditional Era

During the Traditional Era (1800 to 1930), American city council chambers openly asserted public authority. Seen through today's eyes, their design seems to demand citizen obedience and place deliberate distance between governors and the governed. This is done without subtlety or deception; everyone knows where the locus of power is. The design appears to insist that, while those in authority may be elected representatives of the people (or a privileged portion thereof), they occupy a clearly superior relationship to the people. Emphasis is on ruling rather than serving or responding.

Three architectural devices were used to express this idea, devices sometimes employed in combination and sometimes separately: the gallery or balcony, the grand staircase, and the use of authoritative objects and decoration.

In the early years of the Republic the upper-level gallery was often the only space in deliberative chambers open to public visitors. In this way citizens could observe what was transpiring below without having access to the chamber's floor. The elevation difference between main floor and gallery helped to avoid distractions and interruptions by agitated onlookers. At the same time, this physical distance symbolized in spatial terms the distinctions between governors and governed, representatives and represented.

This design feature is found in many state legislatures and in the House and Senate chambers of the U.S. Capitol. Early city halls also used it: The New York city hall, the oldest in the nation which is currently in use (erected 1803-1812), relegated the pub-

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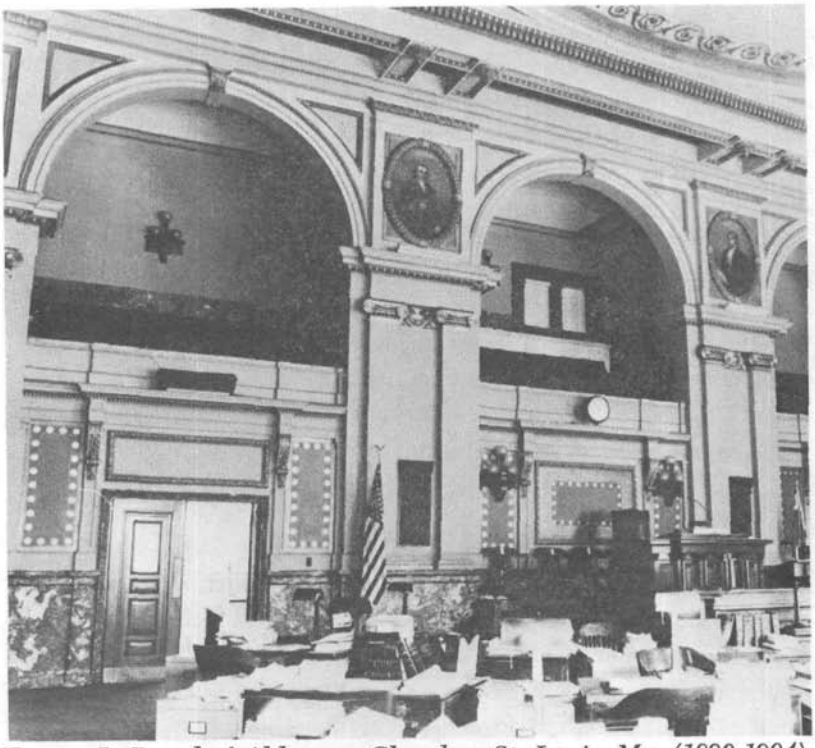

FIGURE I. *Board of Aldermen Chamber, St. Louis, Mo. (1890-1904)*

lic to an upper gallery in the Common Council chamber. Interestingly enough, this was not so in the Board of Estimate chamber in the same building, in which a more specialized and less democratic body convened.

In the monumental French Renaissance revival city hall in St. Louis (1890-1904), the public enters the Board of Aldermen chamber on a balcony raised 15 feet above the floor and reached independently through a connecting atrium (Figure I). A similarly strict segregation was evident in the Baltimore city hall (1867-1875) until its restoration and modification in 1977. In most chambers constructed after 1930 a gallery either does not exist or is used only for audience overflow; after the Traditional Era the public was placed on the same horizontal plane with those in authority.

A second pertinent architectural device is the grand staircase, leading up from an inner lobby or rotunda to the entrance portal of the council chamber above. On the stairway, the visitor—whether allowed on the floor of the chamber or not—is prepared to enter this civic sanctuary by ascending many steps through a massive

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space and alongside ornate decoration, with the chamber entryway ahead the focus of visual attention throughout the climb. Again, verticality symbolizes status differentiation; the humble citizen is not initially at the heights of power and must undergo an upward journey to reach them. The grand staircase is characteristic of both French Renaissance and Beaux Arts classical public buildings, and is exemplified in the grand foyers of the Paris Opera House and Library of Congress in Washington. Illustrative of American city halls is the second-story chamber of Wilmington's Old Town Hall (1798-1799), which is reached by two open runs of stairs that converge at a landing. From there, a final staircase rises to the chamber door. A good twentieth century example of the grand staircase is found in the city hall of Newark (1902-1906), whose Great Rotunda is dominated by a double-curved stairway of 38 steps that leads to a chamber door 123 feet away from the building's main entrance. An even more dramatic example is in the towering Oakland city hall (1911-1914), where the grand staircase rises 50 steps over three landings to the chamber door (Figure II). The visual angle upward from main entrance to chamber door is 20 degrees along an axis 99 feet in length. At the second landing the staircase bifurcates to reveal a giant brass tablet reading:

> The People of Oakland
> Erected this edifice as the seat of municipal government—A Monument Dedicated to Civic Loyalty and to the just and equal administration of those ordinances which make for social and political betterment in community life.

Discussion of the grand staircase would be incomplete without a mention of the most magnificent classical city hall in America, that in San Francisco (1913-1915). In a mammoth rotunda reaching 184 feet from floor to dome (the setting for President Harding's funeral in 1932), the grand staircase rises majestically to a giant chamber portal. Executed in Beaux Arts style, this entryway bears an overhead entablature with sculptured figures and deep-cut letters stating "The Board of Supervisors of City and County of San Francisco."

The third architectural characteristic of Traditional council chambers is the detailing within the rooms. Furniture, artifacts, and decoration were such that they imparted the majesty of authority. Good examples are found in the city halls of Baltimore, Philadelphia (1871-1901), and Pittsburgh (1915-1917). Here central podia are massive, high, and executed in dark-stained, carved

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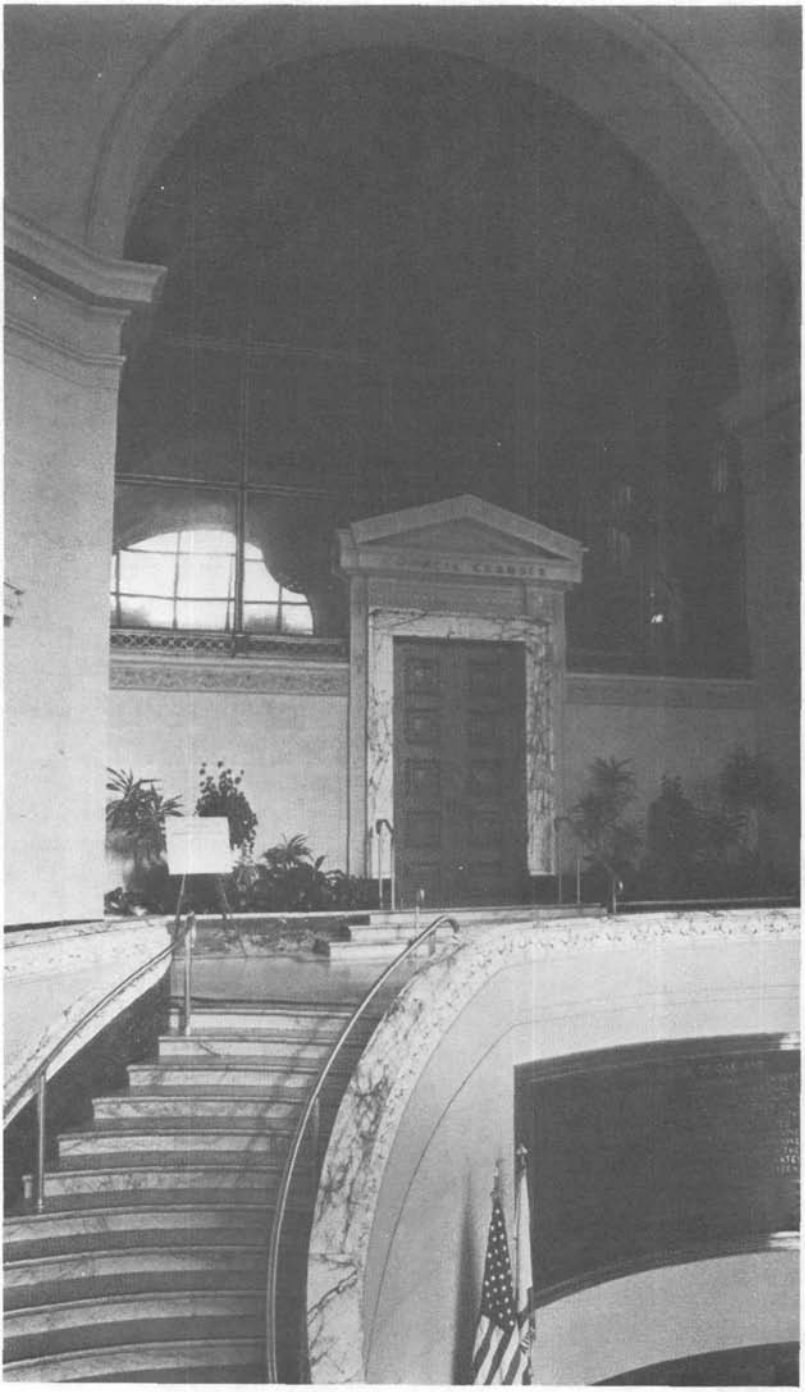

FIGURE II. *Entrance to City Council Chamber, Oakland, Ca. (1911-1914)*

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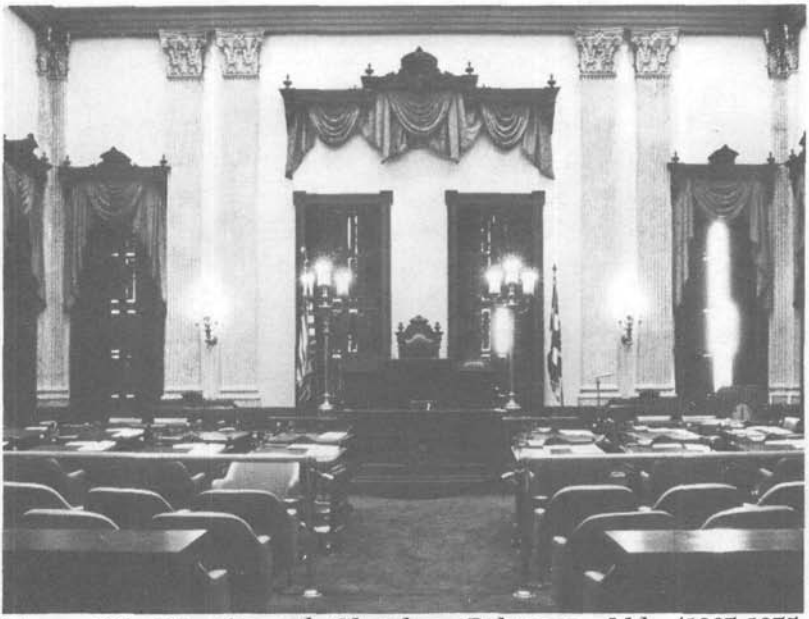

FIGURE III. *City Council Chamber, Baltimore, Md. (1867-1875, restored 1977)*

wood, sometimes in combination with marble. The podium in Philadelphia, for example, has four levels of writing surface, the highest 6.5 feet from the floor. The President of the Council presides from a throne-like chair placed on a platform four feet high; in addition his seat is recessed in the wall for visual emphasis. At the President's right stands an ornate mace, whose globe is surmounted by a silver eagle. Below the President's feet rests a foot-long black granite block, carved from the rocks of Devil's Den as a relic of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Council members in these chambers typically sit at individual desks, similar to those occupied by members of the U.S. Senate. These desks are made of dark, carved wood, their ornateness and physical separation from each other conferring individual status on each member of the council. These desks are often arranged in a shallow arc facing the central podium and council president. The area surrounding the desks and podium is invariably surrounded by a balustrade, rail, or suspended rope. In Philadelphia this protected official zone is demarcated by a brass rail three feet high, broken only by pivoting gates.

Inner surfaces of the rooms are richly decorated. In the beautifully-restored Baltimore chamber, whose overall dimensions form a 40 foot cube, the walls bear fluted pilasters painted in scagliola

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(imitation marble) and topped with golden capitals (Figure III). Ten-foot windows are shuttered, draped, and festooned; below them is dark wainscoting lining the walls, above an indented cornice. The ceiling is rectangular and vaulted with a deeply coffered inset at the center.

Of particular importance in these rooms is the backdrop, the vertical surface behind the podium. It is here that the eye of the citizen naturally rests during the proceedings. As a result, this wall space is especially useful for symbolic displays. In Pittsburgh, for example, an enormous gold eagle rests on a raised shelf between a pair of crossed American flags. To the left stand city and bicentennial flags, to the right state and county banners. Setting off these objects from behind is nine-foot wainscoting with inlaid figuring. This wood surface is repeated in the podium's front face, whose centerpiece inlay states "City of Pittsburgh" and depicts an eagle and a gear.

The Mid-Century Era

City council chambers built or renovated between 1930 and 1960 are very different from those of the Traditional Era. Two distinct and contrasting tendencies prevailed during this period, and each reduced the psychological distance between governors and governed. In some chambers, architectural symbols emphasized democratic accountability rather than unilateral rule; in others, a relative absence of ornamentation suggests functional, minimal government, and downplays the officials' superior status.

There are many "democratic" council chambers, including those in St. Paul, Minnesota (1930-1931), Houston (1938-1939), Alexandria, Virginia (1871-1873, remodeled 1945), Minneapolis (1887-1906, remodeled in the 1920s and 1950s), San Antonio (1888-1891, remodeled in 1927 and the early 1960s), and Peoria, Illinois (1899, remodeled 1950, partially restored 1975). These chambers reduce the distance between officials and citizens, first of all by their spatial arrangement. They are reached either by groundfloor lobbies or enclosed stairwells or elevators, obviating the need for a humbling ascension of a grand staircase. Within the chambers, citizens are seated (usually on pew-like benches) on the main floor rather than in a gallery. This arrangement requires that considerable floorspace be devoted to audience seating; hence, in Mid-Century chambers the square footage of the public zone usually exceeds that of the official zone, contrary to the Traditional pattern. Al-

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FIGURE IV. *City Council Room, Houston, Tex. (1938-1939)*

though the overall (usually rectangular) dimensions of the rooms are about the same as in the Traditional Era, ceiling height is lowered from as much as 35-40 feet to an average of 18-25. This reduces the cubic volume of the room considerably and makes it less imposing.

The furniture and its arrangement are also very different. Instead of individual desks for each council member, an integrated row of desks or a common table or dais is used. This presents the council as a corporate entity rather than as a group of delegates or representatives. In a change of fundamental symbolic and behavioral significance, the seated council members no longer face a presiding officer with their backs to the audience, but instead face the citizens. Following this "great turnabout," the presiding official sits at the dais center as a chairman rather than sitting at a removed podium. In short, the council and its leadership become corporately accountable to the public before them, not to each other.

There are many interesting variations on this theme. Sometimes the dais is straight or shaped in a shallow arc, as is the case in Alexandria, presenting the council as a unified body. Other daises are U-shaped, as in Houston, facilitating eye contact and dialogue between council members (Figure IV). The V-shaped dais, illustrated by San Antonio's, focuses attention on the presiding

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official seated at the apex, in this instance the mayor. In Minneapolis, where the mayor has little power but political parties are strong, council members sit at opposing rows of desks with one party on each side. In St. Paul the notion of public accountability is especially vivid because the council is placed in the center of the chamber so that the public faces the council from two opposite directions.

Other items of furniture also express democratic themes. Professional city managers and their assistants are generally placed at removed and subordinated desks. In Alexandria, the "administration" table is directly in front of the dais but 6 inches below it. Furniture for department heads is placed even more remotely from the center of power and tends to be utilitarian in design. The press is given rather simple tables as well, but in keeping with the journalists' perceived importance in comparison to the bureaucracy, they are usually closer to the dais than the city's own staff. For those formally addressing the council, the public lectern or witness table is generally at the side of the room, near or at the boundary between official and public zones. Some can be quite ornate, such as St. Paul's 128 x 26 inch witness table, executed in Madagascar ebony and golden padouk inlaid with peanut-grained Hungarian ash.

Wall decoration also tends to have democratic content. Backdrops carry symbols of local meaning, such as city seals and murals, rather than flags and eagles. Alexandria's backdrop is a 10 x 12.8 foot lithograph of the city as it appeared in 1863, an object that visually dominates the room. Civic slogans expressing democratic themes are sometimes found on walls; for example, the doors of the WPA-era chamber in Houston are framed by the words "Justice," "Counsel," "Freedom," "Equality," and "The People Are The City." The walls of other chambers carry the voting tally board, which registers members' votes in green, red, and amber lights for all to see.

Yet these Mid-Century rooms are by no means egalitarian. Authority is still expressed, even if it has become publicly accountable. Officials are placed on raised platforms 6 to 18 inches high. The front faces of the daises are often quite high and imposing; in San Antonio the dais rises 3.6 feet above the platform and 4.6 feet above the main floor level, elevating the audience-mayor line of sight to 6 degrees above the horizontal. Physical barriers still exist: In Houston, a solid rail 3.4 feet high separates the dais from the press area, and another three-foot wall segregates

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FIGURE V. *City Council Chambers, Berkeley, Ca. (1908-1909, renovated 1959)*

the press from the audience. The height of chairs clearly demonstrates a pecking order: In Minneapolis the Council President's chair is 3.2 feet high, the Aldermen's 3 feet, the City Clerk and Attorney's 2.9 feet, the Council's aides' 2.5 feet, and reporters' 2.3 feet.

The contrasting Mid-Century style is the plainly utilitarian room as represented in Annapolis, Maryland (1768, extended 1867, remodeled 1934), Berkeley, California (1908-1909, renovated about 1950), Sacramento, California (1908-1911, renovated 1959), Des Moines (1910-1911, renovated about 1970), and Albuquerque, New Mexico (1964). Portions of the Annapolis city hall are probably the oldest structure still in use in America, although the 1934 council space bears no relation to that distant past. The buildings in Berkeley, Sacramento, and Des Moines are splendid Beaux Arts city halls whose classical exteriors, because of extensive remodeling, are no longer matched by distinctive interiors. Albuquerque's chamber illustrates the plainly functional room originally designed in this manner.

The utilitarian chamber is spatially organized like its democratic counterpart, but has simpler decor and furnishings (Figure V). Bare walls and movable furniture make the rooms appear relatively

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empty as well as drab. Walls are plain plaster or covered with sound-absorbing cork; ceilings consist of acoustical tile and recessed fluorescent lights. With the exception of Annapolis, which displays several historical artifacts, chamber walls are dominated by such useful objects as clocks, calendars, and zoning maps. Even backdrops are made little use of in terms of visual messages; whereas in Annapolis a seal is exhibited and in Berkeley a 1960s-style mural, Sacramento merely has a precinct map, Des Moines a glass door, and Albuquerque a wooden partition.

Objects visible around the room all have obvious functional uses: bulletin boards, projection screens, coat racks, drinking fountains. Steel cabinets containing amplifying, broadcasting, and recording equipment are in plain view. In the newer chambers, such as Albuquerque's, television klieg lights are suspended prominently from the ceiling. Because of the very spareness of the furnishings one notices such things as waste baskets, ash trays, telephones, and plastic water pitchers.

The furniture itself is plain and functional. In Annapolis the audience sits on folding iron chairs, and in Berkeley on unpadded wooden chairs. Albuquerque provides plastic shell seats mounted on latitudinal rails. The daises in these chambers are made of plain wood, or are covered with formica or similar material, without ornamentation. All officials, including the presiding officer, sit in plain wooden or simply-upholstered chairs; these are usually of uniform type with all backs the same height. As a result, the people occupying them appear to be quite ordinary, not remote or superior.

The Contemporary Era

Plainness has prevailed in much interior civic design since the middle of this century, but some contemporary efforts in civic architecture—such as the new city halls that win prizes and are featured in the architectural magazines—have decisively turned away from this stark functionalism. Once again it is fashionable for chamber design to be symbolically provocative.

In the Contemporary period (since 1960), a number of distinctive design practices have been used to reduce further the psychological distance between citizens and rulers, and to establish a certain intimacy in the chamber. Traditional city halls devoted large volumes of interior space to public use, such as lobbies and council chambers, and relatively little to workspace use in the

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form of offices, conference rooms, and equipment space. With the growth of modern bureaucracy it has been necessary to expand greatly the space given over to office operations. Solely on economic grounds, then, architects have reduced the proportion of ritual space in public buildings. Modern city council chambers are relatively small compared to those of 75 years ago, in area square footage as well as in cubic space. For example, the chamber of Philadelphia's nineteenth-century city hall (1871-1901) contains 5,652 square feet (including galleries), while Boston's new city hall (1962-1968) contains a mere 3,398. This factor alone has greatly contributed to bringing officials and citizens physically close together.

In an effort to play up the importance of the council as a part of city government, some architects place it in a separate structure. This is sometimes done by constructing a low building connected to a high-rise city hall, as in Wilmington, Delaware (1976), Anaheim, California (1980), and Arlington, Texas (1981). The more drastic approach is to place the council building near to, but entirely separate from, the city hall; this may be seen in Phoenix (1963), Fairfield, California (1970), and Mesa, Arizona (1980). Here the council occupies its own legislative "temple" and is thus granted considerable respect. This spatial segregation may be regarded as echoing to some extent the gallery or grand staircase in Traditional council chambers; but whereas these earlier designs separated the citizen from the council, this one separates the council from the government. As a result, citizens attending council meetings are encouraged to think of the body as "their" organ of city government, an entity quite distinct from the alien and impersonal city bureaucracy.

A sense of citizen-council intimacy is furthered in many contemporary chambers by the configuration of the inner space itself. Long rectangular rooms, which place audience and officials far apart along a central axis, have been abandoned in favor of wide, square, or round chambers. At times the two geometric figures of square and circle are used in conjunction, as when a round, depressed seating area (or "well") is placed within a square room. This is the arrangement in Santa Rosa, California (1969) and Fort Worth, Texas (1969-1971) (Figure VI). Another design type is the perfectly round room, as illustrated in Phoenix, Wilmington, and Long Beach (1974-1977). The effect of these circular spaces is to suggest that all occupants—citizens and officials alike—have something in common. No corners exist to suggest remoteness, no separate sides to denote a distinction between "we" and "they."

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FIGURE VI. *City Council Meeting Room ("The Pit"), Fort Worth, Tex. (1969-1971)*

Since seating in these circular chambers is itself always circular, all persons, including the council, look to a common point, the center of the circle. In Fort Worth and Santa Rosa this is where those addressing the council stand, placing them in a rather uncomfortable position (informally called "the pit" in Forth Worth).

Walls, ceilings, and floors no longer consist of flat planes, but of interestingly-configured surfaces. It is not an exaggeration to describe these as forming a sculpted outer shell that holds the chamber space. In some rooms, such as those of Fairfield and Tempe, Arizona (1971), the area behind the council is angled in a rough "funnel" shape. This projects sound outward to the audience, but also focuses audience attention on the council members. Another device is to slope the chamber walls inward a few degrees; this provides a greater sense of intimate enclosure than do sheer vertical walls. Floors are also sculpted, not only by incorporating depressed wells as described above, but by banking tiers of audience seats in the style of a theater. This increases the observer's field of vision, and when the banking is steep, it reinforces the intimacy of the room's embrace—one "slides into" the space. Sometimes canopies are dropped just above the dais to give it scale and accentuation, and decorative coffers or light fixtures at the center

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of the ceiling draw attention to the public lectern. Wilmington's fascinating chamber combines all these devices: a round room with inward-sloping walls, banked seating, and a wheel-like coffered ceiling with black oculus at the center. Within this space people do not just gather together, they are brought together.

In Contemporary chambers, audience and officials sit much nearer to each other than in earlier chambers. Aside from the smaller areas and volumes and non-rectangular floorplans, intimacy is achieved by simply placing the dais and first row of audience seating closer to each other. Whereas this distance is 38-41 feet in older chambers in Pittsburgh, Peoria, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, it is 21-26 feet in Dallas (1972-1977), Phoenix, Long Beach, and Wilmington.

Elevation differentials have also been changed. The daises, platforms, and chairs occupied by officials are now lower; in fact, daises are sometimes down on the main floor itself and are no higher than a comfortable writing surface (30 inches). Audience seating may also be banked, so that citizens are elevated above officials, rather than the other way around. In Boston the audience's line of sight from the back row of seating to the presiding officer's head is depressed 6 degrees from the horizontal; in Dallas this measurement is 12 degrees, and in Long Beach it is 17. Although its consequences depend on many factors, this elevation reversal is somewhat comparable to the "great turnabout" in council seating direction that occurred in Mid-Century.

Contemporary furnishings also de-emphasize the barriers between official and public zones. Rails, ropes, or walls are dispensed with entirely; instead, the zonal boundary is marked by a low platform edge, or empty "no man's land." The barrier at Austin, Texas (1975) is a low wall broken by indented spaces, suggesting permeability; at Phoenix, a cluster of staff and press tables form the barrier; at Paradise Valley, Arizona (1974) a heavy overhead transverse beam, crossing the room just above the lectern, psychologically separates officials and audience.

In addition to spatial composition and appointments, the contemporary chamber fosters a sense of intimacy through modern communications technology. The voting machine tally board and simple public address system of Mid-Century have been replaced by high-tech sophistication. Contemporary amplification systems employ voice-activated, lavalier-style, two-spectrum microphones, with speakers located throughout the room. As a result, stage whispers can be heard anywhere if the microphones are not turned

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off. And nearly every contemporary chamber is equipped with modern audio-visual equipment, including slide and motion picture projectors mounted in permanent projection booths. Screens are often hidden behind movable panels or descend from the ceiling by remote control. The Dallas chamber, which is full of electronic gadgetry, is also equipped for closed-circuit television.

The contemporary chamber not only allows ease of communication within itself, but in communicating with the outside world. Symbolically this may be accomplished by window walls, whose intent is to tell the world it can look in on "open" government. For example, two of the four walls of the sizable chamber at Walnut Creek, California (1980) are made entirely of glass. In practice, however, visual communication to the outside world is through television broadcasting. While Mid-Century chambers were equipped for radio broadcasting, the Contemporary council room is designed with television fully in mind. Raised platforms for cameras are sometimes provided, although they now have been made obsolete by the hand-held camera. Klieg lights are built into ceilings and walls, so illuminating the space that it is totally transformed: The chamber becomes, in effect, a television studio. With this fact in mind designers equip it with pleated background curtains, textured dais surfaces, and prominent logos or other visual symbols, much like the set of a television news show. One of the best illustrations of theatrical staging is at San Bernardino, California (1972) (Figure VII). There a brightly-painted city seal 19 feet in diameter forms the backdrop for a rotating circular platform that carries a circular dais and administration desk. In short, the space is no longer a deliberative chamber but a public stage.

The architecture of political legitimacy

So the city council chamber as a public space has gone from a civic sanctuary reached by a grand staircase and observed from a gallery, in which the superior authority of political leaders was unmistakably clear, to a down-to-earth arena in which officials were to be publicly accountable and socially unpretentious. Recently, the council chamber has become a psychologically unifying space in which citizens and officials seem to be on almost equal terms, mutually engaged in the work of government. The "intimacy" of the contemporary chamber now extends to the outside community through television.

One cannot help but feel ambivalent about this architectural

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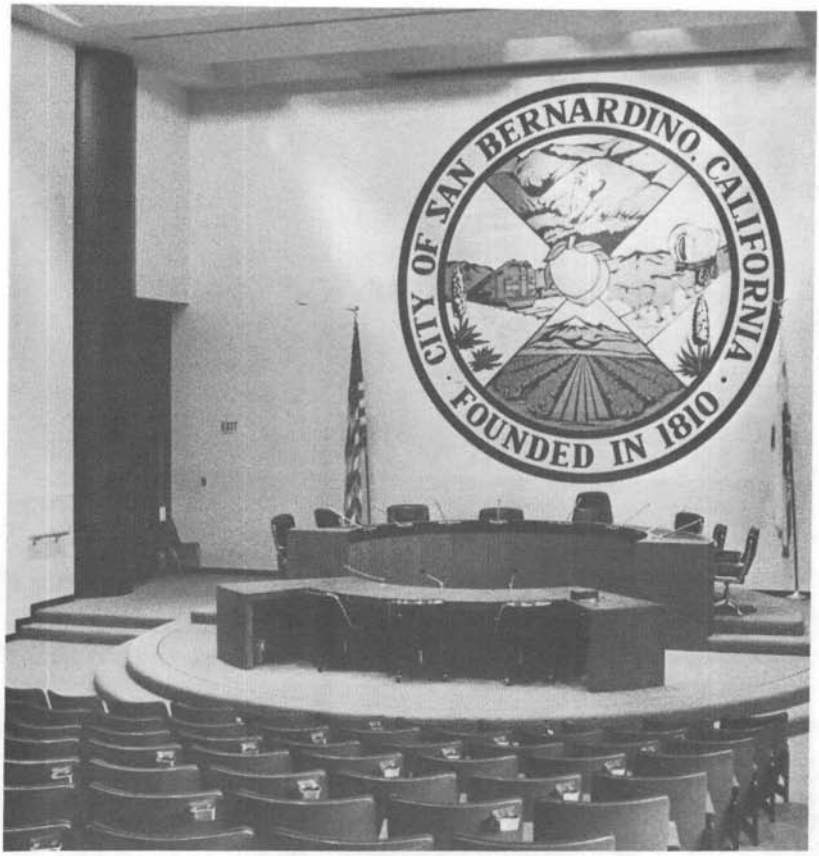

FIGURE VII. *City Council Chamber, San Bernardino, Ca. (1972)*

and political trend. Urban government is more responsive and open than it was in the nineteenth century, and there is no reason why the decentralization of power should not be matched by a democratic chamber design. (One wonders if council members meeting in restored Traditional chambers today feel out of place, or perhaps inspired, in them.) But it is a mistake to depict municipal politics as the intimate participation of equals, as some contemporary chambers do. Politics is not and never will be intimate.

We should be worried when the architecture and realities of government are at odds, since the legitimacy of duly-constituted authority may be eroded by an obvious gulf between them. We should also be concerned when the forms of participation begin to substitute for honest public accountability—when, in the case of television, drama substitutes for real participation. Intimacy and theatrics should not be allowed to undermine either the authority or responsibilities of democratic government.

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Landmarks preservation in New York

JOSEPH B. ROSE

No current discussion of cities can avoid addressing the issue of historic preservation. Twenty-five years ago, the solution to the "urban crisis" was said to be the demolition of cramped obsolete structures and their replacement with ordered modern towers in a pristine environment free from clutter; today, urban planners want to save older buildings as a means "to justify an increasingly dismal existence in a rapidly deteriorating urban environment."[1] What 50 years ago was the sole province of wealthy dowagers has become the latest weapon of urban reformers, who argue that:

> If preservation is not to fall into the trap of total irrelevance, we must learn to look beyond our traditional preoccupation with architecture and history, to break out of our traditional elitist intellectual and aesthetic mold, and to turn our preservation energies to a broader and more constructive social purpose.[2]

In its 1978 decision in *Penn Central* v. *The City of New York*, the U.S. Supreme Court used the controversy over the preserva-

[1] Robert Stipe, "Why Historic Preservation?" in *Legal Techniques for Historic Preservation* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1972), pp. 1-2; cited in *Readings in Historic Preservation*, Norman Williams, Edmund H. Kellogg, and Frank B. Gilbert, eds. (New Brunswick: Center For Urban Policy Research, 1983), p. 60.
[2] Ibid.

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tion of New York's Grand Central railroad terminal to sanction local legislation designed to promote and enforce historic preservation.[3] Since then, the preservation ethic has dominated in American cities. The subsequent record of public preservation attempts is mixed. Bold successes such as Boston's Faneuil Hall and New York's South Street Seaport remind citizens of their cultural and architectural heritage, and have proved effective tools for economic revitalization. Yet local "landmarking" activities have also caused mounting controversy. Critics claim that preservationists are too indiscriminate in their landmark designations, inflexible in the enforcement of restrictions, and blind to the public and private costs of widespread landmarking. These charges have been aimed especially at New York City's landmarking process, the vanguard of the preservation movement. An examination of New York's experiences reveals that these criticisms have some merit, and illustrates the difficulties of systematic landmarks preservation.

A landmarking "binge"?

Extensive government involvement in historic preservation is quite new. Federal legislation dating back to 1906 and 1935 enabled the executive branch to acquire and maintain national monuments, but the first far-reaching legislation was the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This provided for an inventory of historic property (the National Register of Historic Places) and committed the federal government to provide incentives and grants for the preservation of those properties. Subsequent legislation, including the Tax Reform Act of 1976 and the 1981 Economic Recovery Act, has provided significant benefits to landmark properties, such as accelerated depreciation schedules and tax credits for a portion of renovation costs. The federal government has avoided offering more than preservation incentives; local governments, on the other hand, have vigorously exercised their police powers to preserve both publicly and privately owned buildings. New York City has led the way by designating far more landmark buildings and districts than any other city, and by enacting strict landmark laws which have been imitated throughout the country.

The demolition of several prominent structures (including Pennsylvania Station) prompted New York City to pass its 1965 Landmarks Preservation Act. The law created an eleven member

[3] 438 U.S. at 104 (1978).

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Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) appointed by the mayor, with the mandate to designate and regulate individual landmarks and historic districts. The law declares that a landmark may be:

> any improvement, any part of which is thirty years old or older, which has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation. . . .[4]

Designation takes effect immediately after a majority vote of the Commission, but the City's Board of Estimate has 90 days to modify or repeal the designation. Though eligibility for landmark status is not narrowly defined by law, the consequences of designation are laid out very specifically. The owner of a landmarked building must keep it in "good repair" and cannot alter it in any way or demolish it without explicit permission from the LPC. The owner must obtain a permit for such minor changes as painting, adding a new door or sash, installing an air-conditioner, or redesigning a business sign. The LPC's denial of permission is binding, and failure to abide by these restrictions is a serious offense, punishable in some cases by imprisonment. The owner of a designated building who is denied an alteration or demolition permit can appeal on the grounds of financial hardship (defined as the inability to earn a 6 percent return of the property's assessed value), but such appeals must also be addressed to the LPC, and are rarely successful.

Because of the serious restrictions accompanying designation, and the dubious constitutional grounds of such infringements on property rights, the LPC was initially circumspect in its designation of privately owned structures. After the Supreme Court's 1978 decision against the Penn Central Corporation, however, the Commission became bolder and started to designate more buildings, including many whose owners had objected to landmark status. To date, the LPC has designated 44 historic districts (containing more than 16,000 buildings), 690 individual landmarks, and 45 interior or scenic landmarks. This energetic designation policy surpasses the actions of any other city. While some feel the Commission still has a long way to go, the ever-increasing designations have led some original supporters of preservation to refer to a "landmarking binge."

At the outset all agreed that the city needed to guarantee the

[4] New York City Charter and Administrative Code, 8A, 207-1.0(n).

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survival of its unique architectural gems: federalist buildings dating back to the eighteenth century, neo-classical and romanticized Gothic structures from the early nineteenth century, and the architectural legacy of the robber barons (ornate mansions and some particularly appealing commercial towers). New York also contains superb works by the nation's most prominent architects, such as Stanford White and C.P.H. Gilbert. Historic district designation has also protected a few special neighborhoods such as Greenwich Village and Brooklyn Heights, where irresponsible individual actions could ruin the architectural unity and historic flavor of an entire area. Initially the Commission moved to designate only these sorts of widely-accepted landmarks.

Soon, however, the strict interpretation of the original mandate came under fire from those with greater aspirations; for example, Columbia University sociologist Herbert Gans attacked the Commission for trying to "preserve only the elite portion of the architectural past." Preservationists quickly embraced a broader policy, showing concern, "not only for sites with special historic association and with special architectural value, but also a concern for social history—how the average person lived."[5] It became a shibboleth of the American preservation movement that a democratic society should, according to one member of the Commission, "record and celebrate the history of the ordinary, not just the history of the very famous and the wealthy."[6] Professor Gans has even suggested that nineteenth-century tenements be preserved and inhabited in their "dilapidated stinking state" for educational purposes. Driven by this new ideology and free from any strict standards of historic or aesthetic value, the LPC began to designate an extraordinarily broad range of structures, including much of the IRT subway system, lower Manhattan's gnarled street plan, and even the abandoned and decaying Parachute Jump at Coney Island (which the Commission's chairman called "the Eiffel Tower of Brooklyn"). As early as 1972 the Citizen's Union Research Foundation reported that, "In selecting landmarks, however, the commission has looked beyond the buildings popularly regarded as landmarks to buildings highly valued by special interest groups such as historical architects and history buffs."[7]

[5] *Readings in Historic Preservation*, p. 57.
[6] Elliot Willensky quoted in "Harlem Viaduct: Blight or Landmark?", *New York Times*, March 3, 1982.
[7] John S. Pyke Jr., *Landmark Preservation* (New York: Citizen's Union Research Foundation, 1972), pp. 17-18, cited in *Readings in Historic Preservation*, p. 135.

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Preservationists have claimed with pride that, unlike European efforts that give highest priority to aesthetics, the United States primarily values historical associations. This coupling of historic preservation with democratic social history has made it difficult to disqualify *any* aged structure—including an old elevated subway track that was designated "an excellent example of a parabolic braced-arch structure," despite the City Planning Commission's objections and characterization of it as a blight.

Landmarks policy v. land use policy

A far more troubling charge is that the LPC has overstepped its role by becoming involved in land use matters that should properly be addressed by the City Planning Commission. Once it became evident that the Landmarks Commission's power went beyond saving widely-accepted architectural treasures, various community activists rushed to the LPC for assistance in neighborhood preservation and the obstruction of unwanted development. The LPC has often acquiesced in these demands. As a result, the Landmarks Commission has become involved in heated land use disputes that have divided its original constituency and have tarnished the Commission's reputation.

The most egregious example of trespass on planning and zoning matters was the LPC's 1981 designation of a large portion of Manhattan's Upper East Side as a historic district. In one vote the Commission gave blanket protection to 60 city blocks containing 1,044 buildings on some of New York's most valuable real estate, thereby freezing development in one of the city's most vital areas. Though some hailed the designation as an indication of the mayor's strong pro-preservation stance, even supporters of the designation admitted that the area contains many less-than-distinguished structures. Even Beverly Moss Spatt, a former LPC chairman known for her aggressive preservationist views, voted against the designation because she felt the Commission was "usurping the City Planning Commission's powers to prevent demolition, to prevent development and change" in an area that was not "a unified historic district in terms of architectural style or historicity."[8] Critics contended that the Landmarks Commission, by refusing to designate the area's accepted landmarks individually, was making an inappropriate planning decision about neighborhood scale and density. Giorgio

[8] Beverly Moss Spatt, quoted in "Panel Creates A Historic District in Manhattan's East 60's and 70's," *New York Times*, May 20, 1981.

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Cavaglieri, the New York State Preservation Coordinator of the American Institute of Architects, sent a scathing letter to the *New York Times* explaining that the Upper East Side's aesthetic character had more to do with zoning than with rigid design controls. Mr. Cavaglieri has not often been known to quarrel publicly with his fellow preservationists.

LPC chairman Kent Barwick dismissed these criticisms, remarking, "It is not the attitude of this commission—nor should it be—to preclude development."[9] Soon, however, the worst fears of the architects, real estate industry, and many alienated preservationists were realized. Only six months after the historic district designation, the LPC refused to approve construction of a slender masonry tower that was fully in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. Paul Goldberger, architecture critic for the *New York Times*, had nothing but praise for the design and its suitability in the heart of the district, "the most promising residential project to be proposed for New York in some years . . . intelligent and sensitive . . . the facades are elegant and discreet . . . indeed this is an object lesson in architectural tact."[10] Still, fearing that approval would signal leniency, the Commission vetoed the building, "on the ground that it would detract from the architectural unity of its block." Such resolve pleased local community activists and some elements of the preservation movement, but it dismayed previous stalwarts such as the American Institute of Architects, whose New York executive director remarked in exasperation, "We wonder what if anything the commission will approve for the area."[11]

Nor has the Landmarks Commission been shy about exercising its powers on matters of height and density in individual cases. So many religious buildings of dubious aesthetic significance have been restricted by the Commission that an interfaith panel formed by the Committee of the Religious Leaders of the City of New York charged the Commission with "willingly accommodating local groups in abusing the law by employing it for zoning purposes rather than for its lawful purpose of architectural preservation."[12] Some, such as the *Times*'s Goldberger, have embraced this new LPC activity on the grounds that: "There is precious little sky

[9] Ibid.
[10] Paul Goldberger, "Debate Over the Proposed 71st St. Tower," *New York Times*, November 10, 1981.
[11] "Commission Formally Rejects 71st St. Tower," *New York Times*, November 11, 1981.
[12] "Interfaith Group Assails City's Landmarks Law," *New York Times*, March 4, 1982.

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available in Manhattan and there is less and less of it visible every day. One of the greatest gifts the city's churches and theaters convey, then, is the open air above them."[13] But opponents insist correctly that a law designed to protect architectural treasures is inappropriate for preserving open air.

Preservation by a thousand cuts

One explanation for the LPC's aggressive behavior is the relative ease with which it implements its administrative decisions. Regulating land use in New York City has always been a hotly-contested and bitter battle. To guarantee every side a fair hearing, the city developed a regulatory process that, though unwieldy, prevents hasty decisions that ignore the concerns of affected property owners. If the City Planning Commission (CPC) wishes to impose controversial zoning restrictions, it must first obtain a three-fourths vote of the city's Board of Estimate. The weighted voting of the Board makes obtaining such a majority so difficult that critics charge that the CPC is powerless in contested cases. Even unopposed zoning regulations proposed by the CPC must go to the Board of Estimate.

No such restrictions apply to landmark designations. Not only does a designation become effective immediately after a majority vote of the LPC; it can only be overturned if the Board of Estimate votes within 90 days to repeal landmark status. Though the Planning Commission has an affirmative obligation to gain a three-fourths majority for its proposals, the Landmarks Commission need only obtain a simple majority in those rare cases when its actions come to the attention of the Board (the weighted voting allows this majority to be obtained from as few as three of the Board's eight members). Thus landmarking policy, which can be far more controversial than zoning policy, has virtually no checks and balances. The city bestowed considerable powers on the LPC after the controversial Penn Station case; granting sweeping emergency powers to the LPC was then hailed as an enlightened commitment to the city's remaining architectural heritage. The subsequent liberal use of these powers leads one to question the prudence of giving any such agency too much freedom.

To be sure, the Landmarks Commission does allow a disgruntled owner to appeal a designation, but only *after designation takes*

[13] Paul Goldberger, "Theaters and Churches Are the City's New Battleground," *New York Times*, May 30, 1982.

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effect. Every defense of the LPC's activities includes a reference to the "hardship clause" for owners who can show that designation prevents them from earning a 6 percent return on their investment. The frequency with which preservationists refer to this clause does not match the few instances in which hardship pleas have been accepted by the LPC: Of the more than 16,000 designated landmarks in New York City, only five owners have ever been granted permission to demolish a building due to reasons of economic hardship. Moreover, as the recent case of the Mt. Neboh Synagogue illustrates, it is far easier to impose a landmark designation than it is to relieve an owner's hardship afterward.

The designation of the former Mt. Neboh Synagogue on West 79th Street is a telling example of preservation run amok. At a February 1982 hearing the Commission decided to postpone decisions on such notable structures as the Woolworth Building in lower Manhattan and Lever House in midtown. Instead, the LPC debated the merits of designating an abandoned six-story synagogue that was scheduled to be replaced by a 17-story apartment building. A developer, Alexander Edelman, had purchased the structure in March 1981 for $2.4 million, and expected to begin construction on a building of the same height as neighboring apartment buildings, fully in keeping with the area's zoning. However, some residents of the community formed the "Committee to Save Mt. Neboh" and asked the LPC to confer landmark status on the 55-year-old building because of its "synthesis of Byzantine and other Near-Eastern influences." Twenty-five supporters of this committee then attended the meeting of the LPC to urge designation and to cheer speakers supporting their position. Despite LPC chairman Kent Barwick's characterization of the structure as "not architecturally significant," and although no one had an alternative plan for the abandoned synagogue, the Commission voted to designate it because "it represents the important role played by the Jewish Community on the Upper West Side and proudly exhibits a unique and unusual blend of stylistic influences." Commission member Elliot Willensky defended his vote in favor of designation, saying, "We designate buildings because they mean something in time."

Several months later, the Commission decided to accept the owner's hardship pleas and finally granted the owner permission to raze the structure one year later. (By this time the owner had lost about $1 million in interest on interim financing and in increased construction costs). The LPC made clear that it had not

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rescinded landmark status but merely acknowledged that the building could not yield a "reasonable return." The LPC's decision enraged the community group, which maintained that the building could be used "as either a memorial to victims of the Holocaust or as an international art center that would further the cause of world peace."

After freezing the site for a year, the Landmarks Preservation Commission washed its hands of the case and decided to permit demolition. But the Committee to Save Mt. Neboh continued its battle in the courts, using the building's landmark status as grounds for the appeals. The Committee was able to prevent demolition by obtaining injunctions and court orders from the State Supreme Court and a state appeals court. The Committee finally exhausted all avenues of appeal, and demolition was just recently permitted. But now, after years of paying staggering interest costs, the developer appears to be short of funds. So the building sits fenced off and decaying, criticized by community residents as an eyesore.

Who bears the cost?

The Landmarks Commission does not have to confront the economic effects of its decisions, which may be why it has been able to overstep its original mandate. The Commission explicitly rejects financial criteria in its designation process, instead deciding each case on broad aesthetic and historical grounds. But religious institutions, individual owners, and even the city's tax base can bear a substantial burden as a consequence of landmark designation. Besides imposing strict maintenance requirements, landmark status often forces an owner to forgo extremely attractive development opportunities. Such sacrifice may be appropriate in special cases, but failure to consider private and public expense allows the LPC to make designations where a full calculation of overall benefit and loss would urge restraint.

The LPC's license to impose these costs without providing compensation dates back to the Supreme Court's Grand Central decision. The Penn Central Corporation had asserted that the Commission's refusal to permit construction of an office tower above Grand Central Terminal constituted a taking of private property rights without just compensation in violation of the Fifth Amendment. The Court disagreed, holding instead that the denial of permission was a constitutional exercise of the local government's police power, much like a zoning ordinance. While the New

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York Landmarks Commission has taken this ruling as unrestricted permission to designate, critics such as John Costonis, a professor of property law at New York University, have maintained that the decision has been overread, and was addressed mainly to the particular issues in the Grand Central case.

Other critics claim that the entire framework of the decision was inappropriate. Among this latter group was Justice Rehnquist, who wrote in his dissent that failing to distinguish between zoning and landmarking "represents the ultimate in treating as alike things which are different." The majority of the Court viewed landmarks designation as a legitimate attempt to promote the public welfare "by prohibiting particular contemplated uses of land." The Court ruled that the particulars of the case (including an offer by the city to allow development rights from the terminal to be transferred to adjacent sites) did not justify concluding that the city was "forcing some people alone to bear public burdens which, in all fairness and justice, should be borne by the public as a whole."

Justice Rehnquist disagreed vehemently. He argued that landmark designation differs from broadly-applied zoning ordinances because zoning restricts all property owners in a given area and generates common benefits, whereas landmark designation imposes substantial costs solely on the owner of an individual property while providing a costly amenity to the public free of charge. In the Grand Central case the railroad was forced to sacrifice at least $3 million a year in rent from the proposed tower. Rehnquist argued that such a penalty violated the principle of "an average reciprocity of advantage," which Justice Holmes had delineated in deciding a 1922 zoning controversy, *Pennsylvania Coal* v. *Mahon*. Rehnquist felt that the landmark designation had infringed on the railroad's legitimate property rights to such a degree that it constituted a taking of private property and warranted just compensation from the city government. He closed his dissent by recalling Justice Holmes's earlier admonition that, "We are in danger of forgetting that a strong public desire to improve the public condition is not enough to warrant achieving that desire by a shorter cut than the constitutional way of paying for the change."

The often severe infringement of private property rights is not the only economic sacrifice that New York's landmarks process ignores. Restricting the potential for development on valuable sites also contracts the city's tax base. First, the city forgoes increased revenues from the more intensive uses of land which might have replaced landmarked structures. Second, landmark designa-

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tion can lower an existing structure's market value and thus require a reassessment and consequent lowering of real estate taxes. A recently-published book argues persuasively that tax assessors have yet to come to grips with the effects of landmark designation on property valuation.[14] The author, David Lisotkin, makes the case that many landmark properties are being overassessed, and his sophisticated analysis of assessment practices deserves careful attention. Lisotkin's main concern appears to be the removal of unfair tax burdens from already-encumbered landmarks. A further point that Lisotkin treats only indirectly, but that the six New York City case studies he presents illustrate clearly, is that landmarking privately-owned buildings is a very expensive municipal enterprise. In each case the owner of a landmarked structure appealed the building's assessment, asserting that landmark restrictions on development significantly diminished the property's value. In four of the cases the courts substantially reduced the assessments; appropriate reductions are still being considered in the other two cases. Standard assessment practices will clearly be revised over the next few years to acknowledge the effects of landmarking. When they are, the previously hidden public cost of landmarking will certainly receive much scrutiny.

Landmark designations do have accompanying costs, but this does not necessarily mean that these costs make all designations inappropriate. It simply suggests the need for cost-benefit analysis and imaginative alternatives to designation. Fairness dictates that landmarking's economic sacrifices be justly distributed throughout society rather than be inflicted selectively on individual owners. Forcing the designation process to address economic factors as well as historical and aesthetic ones may well be the way to restrain the Landmarks Commission. Requiring some form of compensation to owners deprived of development rights and adding calculations of public tax expenditures to the designation process would certainly make the LPC more cautious about what structures it is willing to designate and what steps it will take to save those it does designate.

Thinking about compensation

Any reform of the designation process must accept that, while city governments are willing to regulate to promote preservation,

[14] David Lisotkin, *Landmarks Preservation and the Property Tax* (New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1983).

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they have not been willing to tax or spend scarce funds for that purpose. It is politically unrealistic to expect New York City, in its beleaguered financial state, to consider doling out vast sums for historic preservation, especially when the Supreme Court has deemed it unnecessary. Hence, most proposed reforms have focused on another valuable urban currency: transferable development rights. Because landmark structures usually use only a small portion of the height and density permitted by zoning laws, allowing the unused rights to be sold for use on another site can be a means of compensating owners for designation restrictions.

New York has attempted to implement this sort of compensation, but rigid controls and labyrinthine approval processes have undermined the program's effectiveness. New York City currently permits a landmark's development rights to be transferred only to an adjacent property. This so severely limits the market for those rights that the benefit becomes virtually useless. And since the complex approval process for any transfer can begin only after designation, the landmarking decision is separated from any consideration of appropriate compensation. This eliminates the disincentive to landmark which the prospect of vast development rights transfers might otherwise provide.

A different and far more promising approach has been developed by Professor John Costonis, who has attacked the New York method.[15] He proposes the drawing of "development rights transfer districts," which would enhance the market value of transferable rights by defining a broader area in which they could be sold. Costonis calls for local landmark authorities to devise a compensation package prior to designation. Such a package would include agreed-upon transfer rights and real estate tax reduction to reflect the landmark property's reduced value. Costonis maintains that "tax losses will be more than offset by increased tax yields from the larger buildings authorized by the transfered development rights." Switching to transfer districts might also spare cities the incongruous juxtaposition of tiny landmark buildings and immense office towers.

Of course, development rights, if they are to have any value, must land somewhere, and many critics are suspicious that transfer plans might lead to serious overbuilding. It quickly becomes clear that a landmarks commission, with its small staff and limited

[15] John J. Costonis, "The Chicago Plan: Incentive Zoning and the Preservation of Urban Landmarks," *Harvard Law Review* 85: 574. See also *Space Adrift* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

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expertise, is ill-equipped to make these far-reaching land use judgments. Therefore, the City Planning Commission should be intimately involved in the landmark designation process, not only to delineate suitable transfer districts but also to further the city's planning and zoning goals. The city assessor should state the probable public cost of a proposed landmark designation. Requiring the City Planning Commission's approval and the tax assessor's comment on any landmarking action could balance the current designation process and restore strict standards to landmark evaluation.

Saving preservation—from itself

Preservationists will no doubt object to this intrusion on the Landmarks Commission's designation power, but such a modification may turn out to be beneficial for preservation goals as well. By relying exclusively on landmark designation, the Commission has failed to consider less drastic incentive programs and zoning ordinances that can still achieve preservationist goals. One such program was the city's J-51 legislation which provided tax exemptions and abatements for the renovation of older buildings. Though originally enacted in 1955 to eliminate unsafe housing conditions in New York's tenements, the program was expanded to promote as well the adaptive reuse of obsolete commercial buildings. Numerous brownstones and commercial loft buildings of real, if not spectacular, architectural merit were benefited. By 1980, over 700,000 housing units had participated in the program, including 55 percent of the city's pre-World War II private multiple dwellings.[16] Almost by accident, J-51 became the most effective means to preserve great numbers of New York's older buildings. It guaranteed variety to the city's housing stock by making the preservation and renovation of obsolete buildings economically viable. (Over the past few years, however, the J-51 program has been virtually dismantled by the state legislature at the urging of community activists who consider it a public gift to private interests. Not a word in defense of J-51 has been issued by the Landmarks Commission or other preservationist groups.)

Another area that New York's preservationists have neglected is the effect of zoning decisions on urban aesthetics. Preservationists

[16] Alexander Garvin, "New York's J-51: The Program that Restored 700,000 Apartments" in *Tax Incentives For Historic Preservation* (Washington D.C.: Preservation Press, 1980).

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TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

In Soho, there is a landmarked co-op with unsafe cornices that the Department of Buildings wants fixed, fast. The co-op says it can't afford the repair and wants to strip the ornaments. The Landmarks Conservancy, which owns an easement on the building, says stripping is not permissible. The case seems headed for the courts. Off Central Park West, the Mayflower Hotel has already stripped its ornamentation at a cost of several million dollars. An architect who observed the work believes the patches will deteriorate in a few years and that the hotel could have saved its ornaments at little extra cost.

Local Law 10, the three year-old facade inspection rule that prompted both cases, is making some architects and building owners feel that no good deed ever goes unpunished. Their frustrations came through clearly at a recent discussion on the law's impact sponsored by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and Metropolis Magazine. "A good law with a worthy purpose that is hurting people and buildings," said architect Ted Liebman, who moderated the evening. Chief complaint: the expenses and deadlines imposed by the law encourage poor inspections and stripping instead of costlier repairs. Suggested remedies ranged from tax breaks for repairs to amendments that will restore primary liability to building owners instead of the architects and engineers who certify the facades' safety. Chicago's model inspection law, which New York imitated, served as a useful comparison until attorney Barry LePatner pointed out that Chicago "inadvertently" omitted the law from its books during a recent codification.

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and art historians may think of upper Park Avenue's consistent cornice line as a reflection of beaux-arts design principles, but it is really the product of a previous zoning ordinance which calculated allowable height as a multiple of street width. Subsequent zoning revised the rules and now permits unsightly apartment towers to puncture what was once an elegant vista. Rather than responding with blanket landmark designation for the entire area (something the LPC cannot effectively administer), the Landmarks Commission should instead encourage the Planning Commission and Board of Estimate to create zoning ordinances more sensitive to questions of design.

New York's landmarking experience teaches that preservation authorities must remain aware of the effects of their actions. Landmarks programs blind to expense and unaware of intermediate measures will be unable to regulate themselves and will miss vital opportunities. It is ironic that New York, whose best architecture reflects ingenuity and unfettered economic exuberance, has employed a landmarks process so insensitive to urban economics, one that preserves the undistinguished structures along with the great.

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Victorian Public Sculpture

GAVIN STAMP

Benedict Read: **Victorian Sculpture.** *Yale University Press. 414 pp. $65.00.*

THE FAILURE of modern architecture and modern sculpture as public arts was once well expressed by Sir Denys Lasdun when questioned after a lecture. Asked if he had ever contemplated using sculpture to relieve the possible monotony of the shuttered concrete walls of his National Theatre in London, he replied that he had: He had thought of putting a Henry Moore at the end of Waterloo Bridge—the opposite end of the bridge from the theatre on the South Bank. It was a profoundly depressing response, because it confirmed what is evident in all modern cities: that architects and sculptors do not know how to work together. It was not just arrogance that made Lasdun dismiss the idea that sculpture could in any way enhance his building. Modern architects conceive of buildings as monumental abstract sculpture—triumphantly so in Lasdun's case—while sculptors consider their work in isolation, as having value only in purely formal terms.

The combination of architecture and sculpture that gave such richness and vitality to buildings in both the Classical and Gothic traditions seems impossible today. Architecture and sculpture both go their own ways, reinforced in their isolation by the self-righteous prejudice of the Modern movement against the ornamental and the decorative—against those very qualities that are so vital in public spaces if the public is to enjoy them. And this divorce is made more complete by the absence of a stylistic framework to unite sculpture and architecture even if the architect tries to introduce modern sculpture into a building as a gesture toward "culture." There can be no integration, for the Modern movement has no stylistic grammar which allows it: The sculpture is a formally irrelevant object, attached to a blank wall in the architect's design or filling some left-over space. This divorce has occurred within the working lifetime of Henry Moore, who, at the very beginning of his career, was commissioned by the architect Charles Holden—no arrogant formalist, but an enthusiastic employer of artists—to carve a figure representing the "West Wind" on the London Transport

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Headquarters by St. James's Park. Moore did not enjoy the discipline imposed by working on a building and did not repeat the experience. The loss is not only ours.

THE VICTORIAN sculptor was very different. To a remarkable and very healthy extent his art was a public one, and a successful sculptor would enjoy public commissions in which he was obliged to accept the discipline imposed by the client, the site, the budget, and the instructions (perhaps) of an architect, as well as by the unquestioned necessity of being figurative. His art was not a private one, answerable only to his own avant-garde artistic conscience. For better or for worse, the works of Victorian sculptors are everywhere. Yet until the publication of this pioneering general study by Benedict Read, the whole subject of Victorian sculpture was cloudy and uncharted. A few names were known—Gibson, Foley, Armstead, in addition to Stevens, of course, and the slightly comic figure of Baron Marochetti—but their work was less familiar.

Historical studies of sculpture have lagged behind those of architecture and painting. We have long dismissed the smug post-Victorian contempt for nineteenth-century architecture, and serious studies are now made of individual Victorian architects. But, except for the great Stevens, no Victorian sculptor has enjoyed a modern biography; indeed, there was no general account of the subject at all before the appearance of this admirable and exhaustingly thorough book. Victorian sculpture has suffered from an even wider lacuna among historians, for even Neo-Classical sculpture seems not to be taken very seriously. Smirke and Schinkel, for instance, are highly regarded as Neo-Classical architects, yet few works by their sculptural contemporaries—Canova, Thorwaldsen, Schwantaler, for instance—are on display in our museums. This is perhaps because sculpture is regarded in isolation by art historians, so we do not yet sufficiently appreciate its public role and its relationship with architecture.

One of the strengths of Mr. Read's book is that, despite being trained at the Courtauld Institute of Art to look at objects in aesthetic terms, he is very conscious of the public role of Victorian sculpture, and, in attempting to establish the criteria by which we must judge it, he quotes many interesting examples of contemporary criticism. This is valuable. We today are so conditioned to be concerned with originality and aesthetic values that it is easy to forget that with a statue of a soldier or statesman what mattered was accuracy of representation. A statue of a great statesman had not only to be lifelike and convincing; it also had to idealize statesmanship and so make a public statement about the nation's history. Mere "art" was not enough.

In England, where we have not yet suffered a political purge of statuary, most public sculpture fortunately survives publicly. If it were not for this fact, Mr. Read's task would have been more difficult, for much Victorian sculpture is inaccessible—consigned by

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fastidious museum directors to vaults or cellars. Contemporary engraved illustrations can never give a truthful impression of a work of sculpture. Indeed, it may well be that those bad contemporary woodcuts of figures in the Great Exhibition are as much responsible for the neglect of Victorian sculpture as were those similar illustrations of furniture in the Crystal Palace for the old idea that mid-Victorian design was so very bad. Inspection of real objects, or even photographs, can give a very different impression, and this book contains a wealth of new photographs of unfamiliar works. One plate is particularly poignant: a fine statue of Prince Albert by Foley gently moldering in a garden at Madingley, near Cambridge. Once it stood proudly in the marble entrance hall of the Fitzwilliam Museum: Cambridge's tribute to her distinguished Royal Chancellor. Such is the way that later generations of dons, smug in their conviction of superior taste, have respected the memory of Albert and have betrayed the intentions of the subscribers who presented the statue to the University. Such, also, are the difficulties the author had to face in tracing important examples of Victorian sculpture.

It seems to me that Victorian sculpture had two great strengths. The first is that it was primarily a public art and a civic art, so much so that the removal of Victorian sculpture would greatly impoverish London and make the public spaces empty and barren. Yet in the eighteenth century there were hardly any examples of statuary in the streets: Le Sueur's equestrian figure of Charles I at the top of Whitehall was a rare exception. Thanks to Victorian sculptors and the nineteenth-century obsession with national achievement and destiny, the streets of central London are a history lesson. Modern sculptors have forgotten this public function, although they still think their work will benefit the public and that the state should pay for the erection of modern sculpture in public places. Yet such sculpture has no public meaning, as it cannot engage the attention of the average passer-by. Public sculpture can no more be justified as pure "art" than can public architecture; other functions matter. It is hard to see the relevance of the Henry Moore sculpture placed on the lawn to the south-west of the Houses of Parliament: an abstract lump with no justification other than adding a little visual interest to a barren space created by the demolition of the Georgian houses of Abingdon Street. And because the best sculptors have retreated to their private world, cocooned by self-justifying avant-garde values, the public commissions which still arise in Great Britain go to mediocrities. The new statue of Mountbatten by the Treasury is embarrassingly naive compared with commonplace figures of the nineteenth century, and the contrast between the Victorian statesmen in Parliament Square and the lumpish, brutish bronze hulk representing Churchill is most painful.

The Churchill statue sits on a crude rectilinear plinth, incised

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with mannered, gauche lettering—the Modern movement's answer to the carefully moulded and detailed pedestals of Victorian statues. Its failure is twofold, for the success of Victorian sculpture often depends on its architectural setting: Figure and pedestal are inseparable. The sculptor was disciplined by having to produce a figure of a particular size for a particular site, and it is often the architectural setting of a sculpture—the design of its plinth—that achieves success. The general effect is what matters. Trafalgar Square would be dull indeed without George IV, Napier, and Havelock, let alone without Nelson on his column and the flanking lions. These statues contribute as much as the walls, bollards, fountains, and lamps. All are harmonious. Individual excellence in sculpture is only achieved within this general formal context and, conversely, the discipline of site, size, and pedestal makes failure less obtrusive.

Possibly the Victorians saw things differently. Mr. Read quotes a contemporary view of the Guards' Crimean Memorial by John Bell in Waterloo Place as "the ugliest thing in London," though today, the stiff formality of the figures of the Guardsmen and their subservience to the general monumental form of the memorial make it seem very successful. Failures there certainly were. The colossal equestrian figure of the Duke of Wellington by Matthew Cotes Wyatt erected on the top of the Hyde Park Corner Arch in 1846 was ridiculed by contemporaries, and Decimus Burton, the architect of that fine arch, was so infuriated that he left money in his will to have it removed. Old photographs, taken before the Iron Duke was relegated to Aldershot in 1883, confirm that it was a very ugly and ungainly thing.

When public sculpture was successful—and there are literally hundreds of examples to choose from in London alone—it was often because of its architectural treatment and the integral connection between architecture and sculpture in the nineteenth century. This was the Victorians' second great strength. Never in England had there been so much sculpture on public buildings. There had, of course, always been a need for good stone carvers to execute capitals, swags, and other Classical details, but now there was a demand for friezes, sculptured spandrels, and anthropomorphic keystones to satisfy the Romantic need for literal symbolism on public architecture. Buildings had to tell a story and to be suggestive of their history. A good example of this is the Government Offices by Scott in Whitehall, rich in sculptured spandrels between the arches (by J.B. Philip and H.H. Armstead) representing subjects such as Art and Agriculture and the several continents. It is sad that often such sculpture is barely noticed. Who ever looks closely at the complicated sculptured groups by Westmacott, say, which were inserted in the pediments of both the British Museum and the Royal Exchange at the beginning of Victoria's reign?

The Gothic Revival further encouraged architectural sculpture. Ruskin argued that the highest forms of architecture were rich in

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sculpture, and that the "Lamp of Life" required that column capitals should all be different and as vigorously carved as possible. The church building boom provided an almost inexhaustible demand for sculptured reredoses and fonts. Perhaps the finest example of public architectural sculpture is the Albert Memorial, a perfect expression of the Gothic Revival belief that architecture is a collaborative effort. The frieze on the podium (again by Armstead and Philip) of philosophers, writers, composers, and artists, is certainly one of the most accessible and enjoyable examples of public sculpture in London. Mr. Read's book confirms how many sculptors depended on architectural commissions in the nineteenth century. It is a pity he does not quote a remark in the *Recollections* of Sir Gilbert Scott—architect of the Albert Memorial—which suggests that, despite all the work available, sculpture still was a precarious profession. In 1876 Scott noted that Redfern was "one of four sculptors whom I have known to have died in poverty within about two years." The others were Philip, Theodore Phyffers, and Alfred Stevens.

THE DEMAND for architectural sculpture did not decline with the demise of the Gothic Revival, for the Gothic Revivalists, belief in the necessity for sculpture was translated into the Arts and Crafts ideal of the interdependence of all the arts and crafts. Though sculpture on public buildings possibly reached its apogee in the 1890s, in terms both of quantity and quality, the demand continued well into the twentieth century. Sculptors such as Hamo Thorneycroft, Harry Bates, and Frederick Poole executed friezes and tympana on the jolly Classical town halls and institutions built around the turn of the century, and many of the best results were associated with artists who were members of the Art Workers' Guild, a body founded in 1884 and dedicated to bringing architects, artists, and craftsmen together.

The integration of architecture and sculpture seems effortless on a building like the Institute of Chartered Accountants, where Thorneycroft's frieze enhances without overwhelming the exuberance of Belcher's Classical architecture. Yet today both architects and sculptors agonize about methods of getting more "art" into architecture. One idea being pressed on the British government is the system that prevails in certain Continental countries, by which a percentage of a building's budget is obligatorily devoted to some "art." But this will not effect integration, as the architect does not know how to design for sculpture, and the sculptor will not take orders. There will just be more Henry Moores in the courtyard, or Hepworths half-way up the blank end of a curtain-walled office block. That is not public sculpture; it is art-gallery sculpture that happens to be out of doors.

Mr. Read's survey ends at the end of the century, when there was clearly a remarkable flowering of British sculpture as well as of architecture. Gilbert's "Eros" in Piccadilly Circus, Thorneycroft's

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Gladstone, and Brook's Victoria Memorial are all London monuments of these years that have since been examined in greater detail by Susan Beattie's new book on *The New Sculpture*.[1] At last the gaps are being filled and research pursued into sculpture that was done on Victorian and Edwardian architecture. But nobody has yet tackled that last great flowering of architectural public sculpture when public sculpture had a popular meaning, albeit a melancholy one: the war memorial architecture of the 1920s. After such triumphs as the Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner, where architecture becomes brutal sculpture and Jagger's magnificent friezes express the horrible reality of war, architecture and sculpture grew apart and went their separate ways. All that could be done after the World War II was to add "1939-1945" underneath "1914-1918" on most memorials. There is not a single public monument erected in London since 1945 that in any way equals even the most pedestrian statues of the Victorians. The loss is the public's.

Victorian Sculpture introduces many new names and fills out the reputations of the familiar ones. Boehm emerges as a considerable figure, as does Foley. Yet I am left with a feeling that the old view of Victorian sculpture is still true in one respect: that the greatest Victorian sculptor was Alfred Stevens. He may not have been typical of his time but his work was magnificent. His Wellington Monument in St. Paul's Cathedral is a triumph in the Renaissance tradition, combining sculpture, decoration, and architectural forms to produce a monument of immense power and subtlety, totally in sympathy with the grandeur of its setting. Such is the greatest public art.

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[1] Susan Beattie, *The New Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

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L. A. Freeway: The Automotive Basilica

CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT

***David Brodsly:* L.A. Freeway: An Appreciative Essay.** *University of California Press. 180 pp. $17.95.*

THREE cliches form the popular image of Los Angeles: endless sunshine, Hollywood magic, and alluring cars. Together, this trinity conjures a picture of paradise, of the good life—sun-soaked beaches, backyards and barbecues, the icy glamour of klieg lights and the jitter of instant fame, status sensuality at 55 mph on an endless ribbon of freeway. Every heaven must have its hell, though, and L.A.'s is painted as a raging inferno of sun-baked brains, cheap dreams perpetually shattered, and overheated traffic jams.

This image of L.A. as a Boschian garden of earthly delights has long been a fixture of our popular culture. Rarely are any of its features the subject of lucid examination. However, David Brodsly's *L.A. Freeway: An Appreciative Essay* gives us the most profound analysis of its subject since Reyner Banham's *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. In the process, the cliche of an automobile culture is restored to its proper place as a vivid California icon.

THE essay took shape as the author's senior thesis at the University of California, Santa Cruz (a fact that should restore at least a bit of faith in the state's increasingly-imperiled university system). Evidently taking his cue from Banham, Brodsly has approached his subject ecologically; his freeway system is the visible locus of invisible social, natural, economic, and cultural vectors. A native of Los Angeles, he has woven in bits of personal history, too, but always for the purpose of illumination. Indeed, describing the essay as "neither a diatribe nor a paean," he declares in the prologue: "It is an 'appreciative' essay in the formal sense of the word. To appreciate freeways is not necessarily to like them but, more important, to consider them rightly. In essence, it is merely the act of seeing. . . . My hope was to understand the freeways, not to judge them."

Brodsly is intent on examining the freeway as a cultural artifact

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—in the broadest sense of the term—in order to see it for what it is: a public record of, and an interactive participant in, the shape of social experience. Quoting Joan Didion's oft-repeated observation that driving the freeway is "the only secular communion Los Angeles has," Brodsly ventures: "The more I think about the parallel, the more I realize how correct she is. Every time we merge with traffic we join our community in a wordless creed: belief in individual freedom, in a technological liberation from place and circumstance, in a democracy of personal mobility. . . . The L.A. freeway is the cathedral of its time and place. It is a monumental structure designed to serve the needs of our daily lives, at the same time representing what we stand for in the world."

Taking this "creed" in reverse order, the complex symbolism of the freeway begins to emerge. It was not the more than 700 miles of freeways that revolutionized transport in Los Angeles; that honor goes to the automobile, for which the freeway was constructed as a basilica. According to the author, on an average weekday the freeways in the Los Angeles metropolitan region are used for 5.8 million trips covering an astonishing 75.2 million miles of travel. Mobility in so vast a region is simply a necessity of life. So, unlike the variegated life on surface streets, the freeways were made to be monofunctional, "a sanctuary for such activity, designed specifically to serve its needs."

THE freeways, Brodsly argues, "have almost singlehandedly expanded the realm of the accessible, and thus they have enlarged what most people recognize as their metropolitan environment." As a result, they have delineated a wholly new sense of place, a sense whose most distinctive features are the experience of distance and time. As much as in any geographical, physical, or cultural aspect, one thinks of Los Angeles neighborhoods in terms of how far away they are and how long it takes to get there. L.A. is a place of miles per hour. Usually raised above or sunken beneath the immediately surrounding urban or suburban topography, the freeway structures themselves also are a place apart—a "no place" that defines and is defined by the nature of passage.

As Brodsly makes plain, this expanded accessibility and its accompanying temporal fluidity have their darker side. Urban *immobility* may be a prime factor in breeding heterogeneous diversity, which the expanding range of the accessible undermines. But there is another quality to the experience of the freeway that strikes to the very heart, I think, of Los Angeles as a cultural construct:

> While it may appear far-fetched to compare a peak-hour commute with a stroll down a country road, the freeway has a certain quality that makes driving it the nearest equivalent to such an experience the average Angeleno is likely to have on a typical day. For here, rather than in Griffith Park or along the beach, *one receives a daily guarantee of privacy* [emphasis added]. Safe from all direct communication with

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> other individuals, on the freeway one is alone in the world. You can smoke, manipulate the radio dial at will, sing off key, belch, fart, or pick your nose. A car on the freeway is more private than one's home.

Considered in this way—and anyone who travels the L.A. freeways with regularity, as I do, can attest to the general validity of the observation—the massive concrete and asphalt channels that radiate outward from the city's central core are not really public spaces at all. "That is not to say that they do not embody a public order," Brodsly adds, "[but the freeway] as a social environment supports none of the social relationships, none of the personal interactions, which characterize the truly public place. . . ." Rather, they are publicly conceived and executed places for the exercise of democratically private experience.

It is this that makes the freeways such a vital, living symbol of the decidedly paradoxical metropolitan ethos of Los Angeles. And *it is this, too,* that makes them not mere examples of late-twentieth century technological and engineering skill, but a specifically modern and uniquely Southern Californian example of a particular breed of public art. We tend to limit our definition of art to those products which have been fabricated by individual artists. But there is also art that is the creation of a whole society, art that arises over time from collective intelligence, fateful trial and error, and the politically-inflected struggles of shared effort. As such, it is a public art that embodies social values of fundamental import, striking to the very core of a culture's beliefs and aspirations.

Historically, this type of public art has been most familiar in architectural forms—for example, in the Gothic cathedral. Constructed over centuries, such works transcend individual capacity and become parts of an extended social process. As the late critic Amy Goldin described these works, "they culminate [in] a result that is clearly within the public realm, and they exist among other objective physical facts. All of them are artifacts—artificial and at the same time supremely natural—linked to human life in a hundred poetic and unpoetic ways." If Brodsly (and, by implication, Didion before him) is correct in describing the L.A. freeway as the secular cathedral of its time and place, then it exists as a central icon of a larger faith, and functions, in the author's words, as "a silent monument not only to the history of the region's spatial organization, but to the history of its values as well."

Those admittedly complex and elusive values are tied, I believe, to a great transcendentalist tradition in the American perception of landscape. In a sense, the secularization of Christianity had, by the mid-nineteenth century, firmly embedded traditional symbols in landscape motifs. The convincing means of expressing religious experience that had been channeled into the themes of Christian art were now called into service for the revelation of divinity in

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nature. The raw, untouched land, sea, and sky of the American continent was perceived to hold the promise of a New Eden.

In our own century, the popular mythology of the earthly paradise has been embodied in the landscape of Southern California. The reality of the horizontal expanse, of the boundless sky and the shimmering Pacific, has held for the twentieth-century the possibility of becoming the ideal. If nineteenth-century Americans had few cultural traditions of their own, then at least they had their ancient trees. And if the semi-arid desert of Los Angeles had few cultural traditions, at least there was the technologically-inspired dream of the ideal future.

To borrow historian Leo Marx's well-known terms, as "the Machine" increasingly invaded "the Garden" in the nineteenth century, introducing a man-made inferno into the eastern United States's natural paradise, the metamorphosis of L.A.'s natural geography into what would eventually become the automotive freeway was just getting underway. One hundred years after the official founding of *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciuncula* in 1781, the rail-link to the English-speaking east was introduced. "The first railroads were the major axes for the emerging settlement," Brodsly writes, "though they in turn reflected the region's natural geography; in general, they followed routes that had previously been used as Indian, Mexican colonial, or American stage trails." The continuing pattern of transportation that evolved over the next century consists of five lines of movement radiating from the site of the original pueblo (about fifteen miles due east of the Pacific and now coincident with downtown) that was dedicated, in almost medieval manner, to "Our Lady, Queen of the Angels." These five directional paths led to early Spanish settlements, themselves dedicated to various saints: San Fernando, Santa Monica, San Pedro, Santa Ana, and San Bernardino. "A quick genealogy," Brodsly explains,

> shows that the route northwest along the Los Angeles River into the San Fernando Valley became a Southern Pacific [railroad] line and later the Golden State Freeway; the route west to Santa Monica became the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad and later the Santa Monica Freeway; the route south to San Pedro became the Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad and later the Harbor Freeway; and the route southeast to Santa Ana became another Southern Pacific line and later the Santa Ana Freeway. Three railroads headed east [toward San Bernardino] through the San Gabriel Valley, as do three freeways today.

Brodsly goes on to assert that this extraordinary network of freeways, evolving over the past 100 years but largely completed only in the last 20, is incontestably "the single most important feature of the man-made landscape." However, this is not necessarily so.

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Equal consideration must be given to what appears at first glance to be a wholly natural landscape. It is well-known that the Los Angeles Basin is, in fact, a semi-arid desert, and that "water wars" have been an ongoing and prominent feature of the city's modern history. The channeling of water from such northern sources as the Owens Valley has transformed L.A. into a man-made oasis. Similarly, and not unlike its population, more than 95 percent of the region's lush plant life (including the ubiquitous palm trees) have been imported from somewhere else for the purpose of fabricating a garden city.

To a significant degree, then, nature is itself a crucially important feature of the man-made landscape. Like the freeways, nature became a vernacular invention constructed through the language of technology. Nature and culture have been so exactly superimposed as to obscure one another utterly: Quite simply, the nineteenth-century natural Garden exists in Los Angeles as an invented Garden.

The secular theology of this New Eden is enacted in the creed spoken in the automotive basilica. Constructed for the sole purpose of connecting the far-flung regions of the Garden, the freeway is a work of public art that has arisen out of a collective faith in the value of freedom to be independent, coupled with the corollary freedom to be alone. Forming a horizontal cathedral as transcendently ethereal as any of its vertically-aligned, Gothic counterparts, the L.A. freeways are symbols of the legitimacy of public support for such values.

BRODSLY is not prepared to go quite so far in his appreciative essay. The reason for this might be found in his tendency to see the freeways as aesthetic structures, almost wholly in formal terms:

> The freeway as a general form lends itself well to a consideration of its aesthetic potential. Freeways are imposing, consciously designed structures, and the best of them can be strikingly beautiful. Outstanding examples are the interchanges. . . . In fact, nearly every major interchange constructed since the early 1960s is of genuine aesthetic interest, providing an interaction of straight and curved shapes which delineate space much as a work of modern sculpture does.

This limited conception is reinforced by the selection of photographs that face each of the four chapter headings. Taken by Chris Micaud, they transform freeway ramps and cast-concrete pilings into abstract, planar sweeps and high-contrast shapes. Aesthetically conservative, if handsome, as photographs, they are reminiscent of styles employed by Edward Weston, Willard Van Dyke, Peter Stackpole, and other photographers working in California in the 1920s and 1930s, or of Precisionist paintings and photographs by Charles Sheeler, Ralston Crawford, and others working in the same

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period. Usually characterized by urban or industrial subject matter rendered as pristine, clean-edged, planar forms, Precisionist paintings and photographs transformed the man-made industrial landscape into an idealized, almost pastoral Arcadia. Indeed, in many respects this art was the machine-age equivalent to the clear silence of a transcendentalist vision embodied in nineteenth-century Hudson River and Luminist paintings of the natural Garden.

To conceive of the "freeway aesthetic" in abstract and purely formal terms, then, is to lose sight of its importance as a cultural symbol—that is, as a *representational* structure. What the automotive basilica represents aesthetically is much more than a merely "sculptural" delineation of space; rather, its beauty is an intrinsic feature of decidedly moral principles that have been championed by the public world.

Nevertheless, Brodsly has shown a perceptive and valuable understanding of his subject. As chance would have it, while reading his book I learned that initial federal funding was assured for the Southern California Rapid Transit District's plan to construct Metro Rail, an 18-mile subway system in Los Angeles. Brodsly's epilogue contains a brief but fairly convincing argument concerning the social and economic foolishness of any such fixed-rail transit system, and suggesting that the poor will pay while the rich ride. He concludes: "One thing is certain: the extreme value granted mobility in our society, a value incarnate in cars and freeways, will be one of the last to go." Social and economic questions aside, never underestimate the power of an icon—even if it seems to be just a cliche.

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1. Office use, left over, etc.	1,557	1,586
2. Returns from news agents	826	650
G. Total	12,401	12,230

11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete: Irving Kristol, Editor

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